

**The  
PHILOSOPHY STATEMENTS  
of  
2004 Indiana Teacher of the Year Program  
Nominees**



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**The National Teacher of the Year Program**  
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November 2003

Dear Fellow Educators and Guests:

It is an honor for me to share this collection of philosophies from 56 outstanding educators. The statements represent the essence of what occurs in Indiana classrooms every day. Those teachers chosen each year stand for all of our excellent teachers across Indiana and the work that goes on every day. Indiana citizens have reason to be exceedingly proud and grateful for the dedication and high quality of professional performance of our classroom teachers.

The impact and influence of teachers on America's future is enduring. As they touch the lives of students, the effect ripples into infinity. Each local Teacher of the Year was chosen as an educator who believes that nothing means more than a good education for our children in their achieving happy and successful lives.

I believe that each philosophy exemplifies the value of education and the concept that indeed, all children can learn. In the book, *Teacher of the Year -- Quotes of Insight, Inspiration and Motivation from America's Greatest Teachers*, Kathryn McFarland, Washington Teacher of the Year wrote:

*All children are creative and talented. There is something special and unique in every one of them. Once I have discovered a child's strength, teaching the subject matter becomes easy.*

In our own reflections, one can easily remember the teachers who impacted children's lives by discovering the uniqueness and talent in each child. As you read these philosophy statements by the 2004 Indiana Teacher of the Year candidates, you will understand the profound significance contact from former students can have on educators.

We all need each other: student and teacher; parents and teacher; community and school. Let us not lose sight of those significant connections. Appreciate them and nurture them. In the words of Einstein, "It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge." Thank you for your support of these exceptional and dedicated teachers who are representative of the more than 56,000 teachers across our state.

Sincerely,

Dr. Suellen Reed  
Superintendent of  
Public Instruction

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# 2004 INDIANA TEACHER OF THE YEAR

***Mark R. Weaver***

Carmel Clay Schools  
Clay Junior High School

## RUNNER-UP

***Rafael Colon***

Fort Wayne Community Schools  
Northcrest Elementary School

## FINALISTS

**Martha Sue Anderson**

Greater Clark County Schools  
Maple Elementary School

**Barbara McBride Lorch**

South Bend Community Schools  
Clay High School

**Anthony James Armstrong**

M.S.D. of Washington Township  
North Central High School

**Trudy Nelson**

Tippecanoe School Corporation  
Wea Ridge Elementary

**Michael Crull**

Jay School Corporation  
West Jay Middle School

**Susan Rodriguez**

Logansport Community School  
Corporation  
Fairview Elementary School

**Tressa Decker**

School City of Mishawaka  
Twin Branch Elementary School

**Teri Sanders**

Evansville-Vanderburgh School  
Corporation  
F.J. Reitz High School

**"My role in teaching is to stimulate the child's thinking and to help them become independent and responsible learners."**

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My philosophy of teaching began forming at home with parents who valued my own educational experience. It continued to form through positive experiences from teachers who influenced me in all levels of my own education.

My basic philosophy of teaching is that every student can learn if given the right amount of support. It's not looking at a student and thinking about all of the things they can't do, but seeing their possibilities, identifying their strengths and building from there. I have learned that keeping my expectations high for learning and achievement influence the learners response and motivation for their own learning. My role in teaching is to stimulate the child's thinking and to help them become independent and responsible learners.

Another basic belief that I have about teaching is that the teacher has to remain a learner. Even though I have stayed at the same grade level during my teaching career, I have always strived to be open to change whether it was using computers in the classroom, trying a different instructional approach or materials in a subject area. To me, change means developing relationships with new principals, taking risks with school needs, sharing new ideas with teachers and

standing up for what is best for students. This has also always meant that change is a way of life within my classroom. I feel that when my students struggle with a new concept, I need to evaluate how I am presenting that new idea. If they are struggling, it is usually a signal to me that I need to reflect on my own teaching practice and change something in my instruction in order to help the student.

This belief about change permeates all that I do now in my classroom and in my school. Seven years ago, when we adopted The Learning Network structure, I was put into a very uncomfortable position as a teacher leader. During my training, I was often asked to articulate "Why I was doing what I was doing?" in my classroom. That question has now become a question that I ask myself daily and allows me to understand where I am in all aspects of the educational process whether it is looking at state standards to plan, evaluating student work or helping a colleague figure out best practices for their own classroom.

I believe that the rewards of teaching don't come in nice plaques to hang on the wall or monetary payment. My reward from teaching comes when I see a child understand how to read for the first time or see a child's face when they are proud

of a story they've written. It also comes on a daily basis as I listen to their own experiences and offer a word of encouragement or comfort when I, as their teacher, am the only one they can find this from. I learn so much about life from their innocent words and emotions. Daily, I have the privilege to grow and learn as an adult in the school environment when I am trying to meet the educational challenges of today's world.

I hope that my students walk out of my first grade class knowing that they are important in this world. I try to give them a desire to learn and structure my classroom in a way that teaches them to be responsible for their own learning. By working on setting expectations with the students, teaching life-long skills, and modeling appropriate behavior, they understand what is expected and know that they can achieve and be successful in my classroom. I also value communication with parents and find this to be a key in helping a child achieve. Through phone conferences, notes, and school conferences, I support my students with the parents to learn and achieve as well. I individualize my instruction by daily assessing student work in reading and writing and then plan my day based on these assessments. My classroom is an accepting, non-threatening environment that fosters learning without fear of making mistakes.

**Anthony James Armstrong**  
**M.S.D. of Washington Township**  
**North Central High School**  
**English, Grades 9-12**

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**"...self-teaching is a satisfying way to learn,  
but much is required of the learner."**

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There is no greater purpose for an educator than to turn his students into self-teachers. High school education is especially important for this reason; students at this level and their parents have not yet made up their minds about whether the students are children or adults. As a result, teenagers have the ability—and sometimes the parental permission—to shift between adulthood and childhood whenever convenient. When they need a car, a job, or a later curfew, teenagers sprout to maturity: “I’m an adult now, and I can handle the responsibility.” When the intellectual challenge of a class becomes a burden to them, or when they have committed a breach of school policy, high school students can amazingly regress into grade school children: “I’m just a kid. Your rules and your assignments are robbing me of my childhood.” It is the obligation of the high school teacher, then, to make his students realize their responsibilities as emerging adults, and to convince them that they should educate themselves. How else can we ready them for the difficulties of college, the workforce, or adult life? I reinforce this belief in different ways.

First, I make certain to create a lively classroom atmosphere; students must perceive learning as accessible if they are

to envision the possibilities of teaching themselves. If I must lecture, then I will do so with pictures, sound effects, anecdotes, and various accents. I insist that group projects be presented in a multimedia style, and that students not merely act out a story or force domestic objects into visual aids. No student is allowed to bow out of class discussion; everyone participates, and no one can use “I don’t know” as a response ...I always say that the wrong answer is better than none. By the end of the year, I select certain poems and stories that the class will discuss without my help. Out of class paper assignments grow more open-ended. My voice becomes quieter and rarer toward the end of the year, as I expect to hear theirs more frequently. Invariably, they discover that learning without me is more rewarding than having my input, as long as I have prepared them in advance with the proper tools.

I also maintain high expectations in the classroom; self-teaching is a satisfying way to learn, but much is required of the learner. Consequently, one cannot just appear in my class and earn an “A.” Thesis statements for papers must be narrowly focused. Written and oral literary analyses must be well supported with textual evidence, or they are not worth the effort. Above all, a student’s

work must demonstrate a sense of ownership. Has she barely fulfilled assignment directives, or has she found a way to satisfy the task's requirements and still managed to customize the work to suit her own sensibilities? When a student asks to make a challenging but pertinent modification to an assignment, or when I hear her authentic voice speaking through an essay, then I know she is her own teacher, and I can send her out into the world ready to face its obstacles.

"You've ruined me," a student will say. "I was reading a book just for fun, and I started finding imagery and symbolism. I was thinking about narrative purpose, and, and-"

"And you understood the novel better, yes?" I ask. "Yeah ...I guess so."

"And you did it without me, right?"

"Yes..."

"Then I did my job ... and you are doing yours."

**"Imagination allows teachers to create learning experiences  
that motivate all types of learners."**

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Talented teachers use all of their resources to create visions for their teaching successes. These resources are intuition and imagination, driven by clear focus and intention, and balanced with the ability to embrace changes and accept challenges. These qualities allow excellent teachers to achieve goals that reach beyond the expected, making them leaders who leave positive life changing impressions inside and outside of their classrooms. Excellent teachers need intuition to understand and relate to the diverse range of personalities found in the students, parents, administration, staff, and community. Teachers who possess intuition can empower even the most difficult students with tools to express themselves. Imagination allows teachers to create learning experiences that motivate all types of learners. The best teachers are able to achieve success because they have genuine intentions, they remain flexible and willing to try new ideas, and they stay focused on their visions.

My personal teaching style reflects all of these outstanding qualities. Three years ago I embraced a new idea when I applied for and received a grant providing each of my students with home computers and enough computers in two of our second

grade classrooms to allow for daily partnering. My students and I became resourceful learners and problem solvers as the computers became our tools for discovery. We entered the realm of higher level thinking skills as we collected and entered simple data into word processing tables, created and interpreted graphs, and made organizational tables for our paragraphed writings. Each week my students became teachers themselves when their parents joined us to learn about our new discoveries. Those computers are still in my classroom being used every day. Two years ago I added to their usefulness by writing and receiving a school wide grant to purchase books and software for a reading program focusing on comprehension. This program has since become a major component in our school wide reading improvement plan. What I have achieved for my school with technology grants exemplifies my ability to take on a challenge, create a vision, and see it through to success.

My reward for being a creative teacher is a learning environment that vibrates with high energy as my students and I interact each day using a wide variety of learning tools. I am also rewarded by opportunities to share our experiences with other teachers, students, parents,



administrators, school board members, and the community. It is a pleasure to take attendance and hear my students joyfully shout in unison, "One hundred percent! Why? Because we love school!" This is the kind of enthusiasm that changes the course of history and produces life long learners who achieve miraculous successes.

"... I strive to provide the optimal learning experience  
in my classroom every day."

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My personal belief is that teaching is one of the most challenging occupations a person could have. Teaching is not just about the ABC's and 1,2,3. Each year more is expected of the students and in return more is expected of the teachers. Test scores are scrutinized and teaching methods are questioned. Staff members meet constantly to discuss old and new techniques and to see if what they are doing is working to improve overall performance in the classroom. I used to believe you could assess the levels where the students were performing and begin teaching them at their levels. I believe in practice and review until the concepts are learned. However, this idea worked more effectively when I was teaching special education and there was not a time-table for lessons to be completed. This philosophy had to be altered when I began teaching first grade because there was a definite time table that lessons had to be taught. The standards have to be covered by the end of each school year whether all the students are grasping the concepts or not. The challenge for teachers is to work intensely to keep all students up to grade level so they can be prepared for the next year. If some students fall behind, this is one of the greatest obstacles to overcome. It is my belief this is not the students' fault because all children have their own

learning styles. This is the time I realize the concepts have to be taught using different methods. I need to use manipulatives, the chalkboard, dry erase boards, or the tape player to relay the message to the students. I believe this philosophy can best be summed up by saying "If I listen, I hear it, If I read it I see it, If I touch it, I understand."

I use these beliefs in my personal teaching style by providing many hands-on activities throughout the year. Some activities include; attending apple orchard and pumpkin patch field trips, hosting Thanksgiving feasts, creating dinosaur stations, writing pen pal letters, hatching chicks, harvesting butterflies and providing read-alouds to name a few. I then incorporate these experiences into our reading, writing and math lessons. These activities also provide a wonderful experience for building background knowledge for the students.

The rewards of teaching come when I can see the "light bulb" go on! When I know students have finally understood a concept or lesson because of my perseverance in finding a method to teach them. Or .... was it their perseverance to learn?? I also enjoy the children's personalities, especially first graders.

They love you know matter what. And, if you've ever spent time in a classroom you would know, "kids say the darndest things!"

I have four children of my own, ranging from sixteen to four years old. I believe this has given me insight on how to handle many situations that occur with my students and their families each year. By using this knowledge and my philosophy of teaching, I strive to provide the optimal learning experience in my classroom every day. I am proud to say I was nominated an outstanding teacher by being voted "Teacher of the Year." However, I must say that I work with outstanding teachers that strive for the best for their students every day. I have been blessed with great teacher's aides along the way who also have a passion for children's well-being. We cannot do this job alone, it does take a village.

**Angela Suzette Bieghler**  
**Rensselaer Central School Corporation**  
**Rensselaer Central High School**  
**Spanish 2, Government, Psychology, Grades 10-12**

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"Outstanding teachers look for ways to make the  
good better and the bad and the ugly beautiful."

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A teacher fulfills many different roles throughout their career. The Merriam Webster thesaurus lists advisor, coach, master, mentor, assistant, and even slave-driver as synonyms for the word teacher. While I am some or all of these roles for my students, I feel assistant best describes me and my philosophy of teaching. While the philosophy that all students can learn is shared by many, my desire to make that happen is what I believe makes me an outstanding teacher.

I spend a large amount of time with the future leaders of our country teaching them about government, Spanish, and psychology. While subject matter is important and standards must be met, I believe that it is equally important for students to learn something about themselves in my classes. My goal is to help them to see what they are capable of. I want them to know that it is possible to achieve their goals and dreams.

Achieving my goal can sometimes be a challenge. My classroom is filled with all levels of students from all walks of life. Several years ago, our faculty chose to adopt the block eight schedule. This positive step has allowed teachers and students to develop relationships that are more personal in nature. I make it a point to talk to every student in each of my

classes, everyday. My life philosophy is that it is best to take a walk in someone else's shoes to keep from stepping on any toes.

In order to help kids to see what they are capable of, I give them as many chances as possible to demonstrate what they can do. This would not be possible without first finding out what their interests and goals are. My lesson plans consist of individual, cooperative learning, and project-based activities that require the students to use the knowledge they have gained in a practical way. My lesson plans are as diverse as my students. As time consuming as it may be, I rarely use the exact same lesson plans from year to year. This allows me to remain positive and **excited about what I am teaching. If** I appear bored to my students, then I instantly become boring to them.

By listening to what the students have to say and being flexible, I can best fulfill their needs. My students play an active role in the decision making that goes on in the classroom. It is not uncommon for one class to be working at a different pace or level than another. Last semester, one of my classes spent the entire class period debating racial profiling. The same discussion did not unfold in the next period and I proceeded with my original

lesson plan. Flexibility allows me to accomplish two things. First of all, my students see that they can make a difference. Allowing them to participate in the democratic process helps them to see how important their voices are. Secondly, it allows me to sit back and see my students in action. Some of my most memorable teaching moments have been when the students have changed the direction of my lesson plan with their questions or ideas. With this teaching style, discipline issues rarely surface. When they do, they are dealt with in a firm, but fair manner.

Teaching has often been called a thankless job. A person looking for obvious signs of approval such as frequent praise or monetary compensation might be disappointed. Almost any teacher can take the good, the bad, and even the ugly and survive. After all, this is what we are trained to do. Outstanding teachers find the intrinsic rewards in teaching. Outstanding teachers look for ways to make the good better and the bad and the ugly beautiful. When life hands us lemons, we make lemonade. We are never afraid to roll up our sleeves, reach in there, and start squeezing. We may get tired of adding sugar and stirring, but in the end, we are never thirsty. I look forward to a long career in this venerable field and all the free lemonade that comes with it.

**"I believe it is important to make parents  
a part of the education process."**

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I believe there are several elements that make me an outstanding teacher. The one that I feel is the most important is the belief that these are my kids. I have an emotional as well as a professional stake in each of these students. Whenever I question myself as to how to proceed or how to handle a situation, I ask myself, "What would I want a teacher to do for my own child?" Sometimes it involves being nurturing, supportive, firm, sticking to expectations or going the extra mile. In all cases, it requires respect and understanding. My dedication and willingness to do this along with realizing the impact of what I say and do will leave a mark drives my teaching.

This belief also impacts my communication with parents. I believe it is important to make parents a part of the education process. I communicate regularly with parents through newsletters, notes and phone calls. I strive to communicate successes as well as stumbling blocks along the way. I work on developing activities, such as math games and the interactive writing activity, for students to take home that will involve the parents in what is happening in the classroom. With our emphasis on standards, I have communicated with parents on each skill that is being taught in the classroom and their child's progress

in each area through grade level forms I have helped developed.

Another important aspect of my teaching is my belief that I need to continually assess my own performance in the classroom. This statement from my student teaching training plays in my head daily in the classroom; "There is no reason for the train to leave the station if everyone is not on board." I continually check for understanding of the skill and assess whether I have done everything needed to get all my students on board before moving on. I look for avenues to make myself a better teacher by attending workshops, reading the latest education literature and being an active, involved member of my school community.

The rewards of teaching are numerous. The sharing and caring of fellow teachers as we work together to benefit our students through our school improvement plan has been heartfelt. The joy expressed by a student that has struggled and finally made it is priceless. The acknowledgement of parents for your hard work and time is wonderful. The greatest reward however is knowing that I have been a small part of my students' lives.



**"We need to have the flexibility of imagination and wonder  
to develop critical thinking."**

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It is my belief that life and society are ever changing processes. It is adapting to these changes that helps make one a good teacher and one a good learner. I don't claim to have all the answers to the philosophy of teaching however; I know a few things that help make the process work for me.

First off, children need a form of structure. Just like the foundation of a building needs good stabilization. I feel that children need to know what is expected of them and how to achieve those expectations. Examples of structure would be rules, expectations, routine, and consistency. After obtaining a good foundation, the creative process will follow.

Secondly, our minds are formed by the connections we make throughout our lives. If we start to generalize curriculum, testing, and performance, the creative process in the mind will cease. We need to have the flexibility of imagination and wonder to develop critical thinking. The question is how to achieve this process. One way is through the arts. Whether a student is good in writing, drawing, painting, dancing, or sculpting, the ability to inscribe helps that idea stabilize the experience. What would be gone momentarily is now an example of history and culture.

Thirdly, I believe that teaching should relate to the students' world in which they live. Using examples of situations and problems that they are confronted with helps students learn to problem solve. In figuring out certain situations, the student will feel the empowerment of his or her own ability. Often times, I feel we do not give our children the opportunities to figure things out on their own. Perhaps we don't give them enough of the right tools to figure things out. These tools can be in various forms. Some students learn by the visual experience, some kinetically, some literally, and some orally. I believe that we are all blessed with certain gifts in life. We go through a process and journey of trial and error, imagination and wonder, before we understand who we are.





**Debora A. Burns**  
**M.S.D. of Perry Township**  
**Southport Elementary School**  
**Music, Grades K-5**

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"It is our job to be aware of the latest information and use it to ...  
engage all children who come through our doors."

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I believe that education is the basis for all human cognitive, emotional, volitional and aesthetic growth. Education begins and is rooted in the home. As teachers we continue and support this process, helping each individual child grow and discover the world around them and their place in that world. Teachers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century have a wealth of knowledge and information available about "brain compatible learning", "learning styles", "multiple intelligences", and other learning theories. It is our job to be aware of the latest information and use it to shape our classrooms and our teaching style so that we can reach and engage all children who come through our doors.

My classroom is best characterized by the word "variety." I give to my students a broad look at the world through music, from Nursery Rhymes to Opera, from the ISO to the Backstreet Boys, from pencil and paper to computer, piano to synthesizer, singing and playing to rapping and dancing, waltzing to the Electric Slide. Students read in my classroom, do math, learn about cultures, the continents, countries and states, do science experiments to learn more about sound and hearing, and sing, play, learn and create with music. Their senses are engaged in seeing, hearing, touching, smelling—experiencing their world.

Through a wide variety of hands-on and active experiences, each child can find something in the world of music that speaks to them. They can find a way to express themselves in an atmosphere of caring, encouragement, respect and support. They trust and know that their individual opinions and creations will be acknowledged and accepted. A teacher fosters this kind of environment by being enthusiastic about his/her subject(s), by modeling expected behavior, by having high expectations and encouraging each student's best, by recognizing a child's individual achievements, no matter how small, and by sharing their own eagerness to learn. As William Butler Yeats said, "(Education is) ... not filling a pail, but lighting a fire."

A teacher's world does not end at the classroom door, however. Educating a child is a team effort. Communication with, respect for and rapport with other teachers, staff, administration and parents, is a benefit for all. I attend students' recitals, concerts and award ceremonies outside of school to let the children and parents know that each child is important to me. I attend grade level meetings, to share what I am doing with students, to exchange concerns or kudos about students, and to find out what is happening in the regular classrooms.

Whenever possible, I reinforce what is being taught in the homerooms. For example, when students are learning the states, we sing *Fifty Nifty United States*, when students study the Civil War, we learn square dancing and discuss and sing spirituals. When third grade comes to their science unit on sound, we also do a sound unit complete with experiments in the music class. We end the unit by applying what we've learned to create our own instruments. The smiles and proud faces are many as the children share their creations.

And that is my reward—when the children have discovered a part of music that delights them, that they are successful at and that they share enthusiastically with others. I enjoy the many notes and drawings I receive from students, and they are often displayed in my room. I love when former students take the time to visit and tell me what they are doing and what they remember from elementary music class. I can't help but beam when new students grab their parent's hands and insist that they have to meet "my music teacher." But then I also find reward in just simply teaching music—being immersed in something I love and sharing it with eager learners.

**Carol Burt**  
**Muncie Community Schools**  
**Sutton Elementary School**  
**Art, Grades K-5**

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**"I choose to remain a student for the duration of my career  
because I enjoy that role and have a thirst for learning."**

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Like all educators, my philosophy of teaching is a collection of ideas from many sources pooled with my own experiences, and my style of teaching is basically an extension of my personality. When I look back, I remember teachers not for the way they taught, but for the way they interacted with students. It is a priority to build relationships with students, especially in my room where I see students from kindergarten through fifth grade. I am at times an actress, a writer, a marine biologist, an entomologist, a singer, a mathematician, and a mother. I'll assume whatever role necessary to make my teaching successful. Sometimes the mood in my classroom is light, sometimes very serious. We are at times loud and at other times, quiet with concentration. My room is in a constant state of flux with the changing of classes and materials, but it is always a safe and nurturing place for learning.

When I moved to the elementary level, I discovered I knew very little about life below the poverty level and the culture where I was teaching. This caused a major shift in my ideals. I began to see education as a tool for change for these children with art as just one of the avenues for discovering what the world has to offer. I want art to open doors and allow my

students to travel through images to see that life exists beyond the confines of our city. I want to tell stories about the artists, to make the images come alive with the people who created them, to place art works in their proper contexts so students can see that art traces the history of life. I know the force that art continues to have on my life, and I want to share its impact at every opportunity.

I also have a commitment to building basic skills and fine tuning them throughout the elementary years. We examine the differences between control and lack of control in processes such as cutting with scissors, applying glue, measuring with a ruler, or painting with a brush. These are life skills adults use routinely, and performing these tasks can be improved and perfected at an early age.

I am also a practitioner of my discipline. I feel I am a stronger teacher than I am an artist, but I know I am a stronger artist because I teach. It only makes sense to make art on a continuing basis and to share those experiences with my students. I choose to remain a student for the duration of my career because I enjoy that role and have a thirst for learning. In the same way artists show their work, I exhibit my students' work at every opportunity.

Art is meant to be viewed, and children's art can have as great an impact or greater than that of an adult.

I believe all educators must work together to improve the status of education through accountability and professional development. I have a responsibility to share my successes with other teachers, whether it is with teachers in my building, my corporation, in the state, or on the national level.

I have great respect for the people in my profession. It is easy to speak of the rewards and my feelings for the career I have chosen and why it makes me do what I do. I look forward to going to work in the morning and always wonder how Friday comes around so quickly. I read about art and experiment with new projects in the hope of pleasing them with new ideas. It's a thrill to see the look on my students' faces when we explore materials, and they think I'm magical and can do anything the "real artists" can do. I'm a terrible show-off when it comes to my students' work; they are amazing people. When you put all the standards and testing aside, you end up with the pleasure of being with children. Teaching is a profession that requires you to give a huge part of yourself. The humanness of teaching is a very integral part my job.

**Larry L. Castor**  
**Plainfield Community School Corporation**  
**Plainfield Community Middle School**  
**Language Arts and Math, Grade 6**

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"Our world is an ever rapidly changing place and  
we need to prepare our future adults for whatever lies ahead."

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I refer to the school year as "going around the block." Each year I pick up a new group of students, and I must transport them safely through my neighborhood. The goal is to walk them through reviewing what they remember from their old neighborhoods, teach them about my special neighborhood, and encourage them to cross the street and explore all the new areas they are going to come in contact with during their lives.

My teaching assignments are mathematics and language arts. The first day of the school year involves meeting students at the corner of my block. The subject matter requires that I first know where my students have been. We all come from different educational reference points. In my class, I must use my skills to diagnosis their strengths and weaknesses before we can walk forward. Once their needs are assessed we begin our trek.

Every year brings new adventures. No two classes are alike, nor are any two years the same in my room. The students tell and demonstrate for me what they need. Some of them want to run down the street picking out only the things they see on the surface, never stopping to check out the details as they run by so quickly. Others like to stroll and examine things for hours

while everyone else passes them by. Some kids like to walk in groups holding hands and helping one another look over the high brick wall into the neighbor's yard. Others wait by the gate alone searching for the correct key to open the lock. My challenge is to meet everyone's needs and learning styles, to allow them to move at their pace, and to hopefully make the walk memorable.

There are certain things that all must get to see, know, and learn. Some students are going to take a special interest in some things, and I have to allow them to explore their interests. Others may not be interested, but I must encourage them to look and to know. I try to use a variety of teaching techniques in my classroom to accommodate a variety of learners.

All neighborhoods change—remodeling, new gardens, people moving in and out, etc. Likewise, I believe my classroom needs to change from year to year. I believe even good things can be made better. This not only applies to my students, but to my plans, and me as well. I need to remodel and put on a new coat of paint often. I must be willing to try new things and model it for my students. If I don't, how can I expect the young people I am in charge of to try new things? Our world is an ever rapidly changing place

and we need to prepare our future adults for whatever lies ahead.

When my students ask for help with something I know that they already know, I tell them, "I can't stay with you forever." That is my way of telling them to think about it again, that I have faith in their ability and intelligence. Our walk together is for a year. I know I cannot stay physically with them forever. There are new students coming to my neighborhood and they must move on to more challenging and new neighborhoods every day of their lives. My hope is that the time spent with me helps them to learn and explore whatever comes their way in a meaningful and helpful way for themselves, their families, and their world.

**"Establishing a strong relationship with my students  
must go hand-in-hand with their academic development."**

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At the start of each school year, new fifth-graders enter my classroom with diverse goals, expectations and anxieties. My role as their instructional leader is to focus their energy—both positive and negative—in one direction with the objective of helping them achieve the best education possible.

In order to achieve this goal, I must create a learning environment in which my students feel safe, respected and loved. They must also feel free to express themselves without fear of ridicule. I must be an effective communicator in imparting my knowledge to my students to help them develop intellectually and morally. My experience has shown me that when this type of classroom environment is achieved, students are more willing to learn and have lots of fun in the process!

A critical part to establishing a nurturing learning environment is building a strong relationship with my students. At Northcrest, approximately 60 percent of the school's 500 students are on free/reduced lunch. Many students do not have an opportunity to experience life outside Fort Wayne's urban setting. I believe it is my responsibility as their teacher to motivate them to think outside of their current circumstances. In building this

relationship I must be willing to be transparent. That is, I want my students to see that I am a "regular guy," someone who has gone through similar difficulties they are experiencing. I do this by being open and honest. I tell them about my experiences as a teenager, both the negative and the positive, to help them understand that I didn't always make wise choices. I also share stories about my wife and children in an effort to promote a classroom atmosphere that is trusting, inviting and comforting.

I am also responsible for developing the moral growth of my students. Developing moral character in our children was once deeply rooted in the fabric of our nation, particularly in our early American history. One only needs to examine the writings of the men and women who founded our great nation to see that they held the view that high moral standards would need to be exhibited by its leaders and citizenry if the great experiment—A Republic—was to flourish in the New World. The writings of the builders of our country also show that they believed that schools had the responsibility of teaching moral principles to its citizens.

I believe that in order for my students to be productive citizens they must possess both intellect and moral integrity. I also



believe they need to know that there is such a thing as absolute truth, that there are things that are absolutely right and things that are absolutely wrong. My desire is to instill in my students a sense of conscience, compassion, and self-control. I believe these are just a few principles that will help them become persons of character. The most effective way I can teach these ideals is by personally living them out before my students, and that is what I try to do daily. I believe in the credo that high moral standards are caught more than they are taught.

Establishing a strong relationship with my students must go hand-in-hand with their academic development. I have been entrusted with the daunting task of ensuring each one of my students is working to their maximum potential. Therefore, I must use various instructional methods to make sure all of my students—from the most advanced to those who need additional assistance—are meeting academic standards. My students and I work as a team to make this happen. Because of the relationship established early in the school year, they know they won't be ridiculed by classmates if they ask for help, need more time on an assignment or don't know the answer to a question. They understand that we all play a part, whether large or small, in each other's success.

My success in the classroom has been helped tremendously by my colleagues at Northcrest. I am still growing as an educator and rely on their expertise to create the best learning experience possible for my students. We share best practices to ensure no student falls through the cracks. Our teamwork is one of those subtle messages to our students that we are all committed to their academic success.

**"Educational success should not be measured in a time frame.  
It is a continual process."**

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The educational process must be student centered. Education in one form or another is the avenue to one's professional success no matter what the endeavor. Students must be the number one concern of the people working in the field of education. Too often children are an afterthought in the learning process. Building leaders, teachers and parents must find a way to help all students achieve success.

Success in education can be measured in several different ways. It might be a great project or exam score or it might be one student helping another in the learning process. Educators too often measure student success based on numbers and grades yet many students just take a little longer to grasp the concept being taught. Educational success should not be measured in a time frame. It is a continual process. Building leaders and teachers must recognize and act upon the needs of all students.

Children enter the educational process with great enthusiasm and willingness to learn. Educators must keep this attitude alive. Learning must be fun for children. When students enjoy learning, they will have a great attitude and will give their best effort no matter what age they might be. Educators must earn the respect of the children in the school and when this

occurs, children will give their best effort and respect in return.

The learning process is also the responsibility of the student. Schools are successful because of the attitude of the student body. Children must take responsibility for their actions and choices throughout their educational process. Students also need to be stakeholders in the school. Educators facilitate the mission of the school. The student body must accept that mission. Building leaders must include students as often as possible when decisions concerning the school are made. These opportunities will develop a stronger, more loyal student body and will lead to successful results in the classroom.

The learning process extends much further than just the four walls of a classroom. We also need people in our schools who are willing and able to help children in all facets of life. Children need adult role models and people who will listen as they experience tough situations throughout their lives. Learning is more than books and lectures; it is also the development of character. Having the opportunity to work under Dr. Duane Hodgins in Lawrence Township has helped me recognize that character goals must be present in every school, classroom,

gymnasium or any place the students might congregate. Corporation wide character development leads to greater respect amongst the staff and student body.

The beliefs that I hold about building leaders, teachers, and the learning climate reflect my personal philosophy of education. I believe that teachers need to foster responsibility and a commitment to excellence, encourage the talents of each child, and help develop the character of the student body. I believe that all students can be active learners, prepare for life through practical application, and that all students are unique. My mission is to make a difference in the lives of all people around me.

**"Real learning for real life is the heart and spirit of what I do."**

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There is no higher calling on earth for me than to be a teacher. I cannot imagine doing anything else, and although there are days when the paperwork and politics of the profession become overpowering, the majority of my days are filled with the elation I derive from teaching. My personal philosophy of teaching boils down to three simple ideas: passion, purpose, and personal best.

First of all, a teacher must have a passion for teaching. A teacher must have a passion for delivering knowledge in a creative and useful way, a passion for the heart of each and every student, and a passion for imparting knowledge will make a difference in each student's life. There must be a desire and drive that goes beyond textbooks and rote lesson plans. It is this desire and passion that drives excellent teachers to stay up late at night creating exemplary lessons to reach struggling students when every other lesson and method has failed. It is this type of passion that truly sustains me. It drives me to do what I can for each student to feel successful and cared for each day.

Secondly, there must be purpose. My purpose is to teach the value of education and the importance of lifelong learning. Most of all, I want my students to know

that I can improve and can always find ways to learn more and expand my own knowledge. Through my example, they can see the value of education and lifelong learning.

Lastly, there must a desire to do and give one's personal best. Yes, there are days when I feel everything around me is collapsing and going wrong, but I must still pick myself up and walk into my classroom ready to give my students my personal best. As educators, personal best is a conscious decision to give all that we have each and every day. It is no surprise that as we give our personal best, our students will give their best in return. Success for the students in my class and for myself is beautifully interwoven with these three simple ideas: passion, purpose, and personal best. I teach with love, with pride and joy, with honor, with a purpose, with a passion, and with my personal best so that every child can succeed and grow. This is what children desire and what leads to outstanding teaching.

I envision an ideal classroom as one that is student-centered. Real learning for real life is the heart and spirit of what I do. Every standard is taught through hands-on units where lessons are directed, not by textbooks, but by guest speakers, research, and self-inquiry. The speakers

share about their life in different countries, and enhancing is done by reading books related to the country. Students study the economy by doing family surveys, stock market simulations on the computer, and forming trading companies in the classroom. Students are given choices in how they present material they have learned and have a unique and distinctive way to convey the knowledge they have obtained and learned. I want my students to be able to apply what they have learned to real-life situations. After all, application of the knowledge and/or skills learned shows true mastery.

The greatest gift a teacher can ever have is the gift watching a child learn and grow. I realize that I can only change the world one mind at a time. I must celebrate this challenge and have a personal passion and commitment to it, and then celebrate the amazing students who come in and out of my life. The rewards from teaching are great: a hug, a thank you, a smile, a head held high, a note of appreciation, a look of accomplishment, and the knowledge that you have touched a life.

**John W. Dawson**  
**Nettle Creek School Corporation**  
**Hagerstown Junior-Senior High School**  
**Business Technology Education, Grades 7-12**

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**"As an educator, it is my belief that it is important  
to greet change with enthusiasm."**

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It is my belief that all students are able to learn in one way or another. One of the challenges of being an educator is finding ways to reach the students. An educator must be willing to step out of his/her own learning style and adapt the lesson(s) to meet the different styles in the classroom. I try to use as many different styles in my teaching as possible. Students know that they can ask me to re-teach a lesson and that I will not be offended or chastise them for asking.

Students need to see the relevance in learning—it helps them to relate instruction to their future. If a student does not see the relevance, then their retention of the material will not be as great. I try to relate topics in my classroom to either their current lives or to their future.

Educators are not just teachers, they are also advisers. Many of today's students do not have a good home life. Parents or guardians may go days without offering them praise or just asking how they are doing. As an educator, I believe it is frequently my place to fill in for the parent. I have been piloting an Adviser/Advisee program with my Student Resource Time class. I monitor these students' grades, offer career counseling, assist with homework, develop a portfolio,

and am in essence someone who cares. I often ask these students how things are going—they know that they are welcome to come and talk to me and I will not be judgmental. I will offer them advice or send them to someone who can get them assistance.

As an educator, it is my belief that it is important to greet change with enthusiasm. By making changes and staying current, my teaching will stay current. I try not to get stuck in a rut and teach the same thing, the same way, over and over again. This philosophy of instruction keeps me fresh and abreast with the latest strategies and technology.

While all of the before-mentioned items are important, I am also concerned about creating productive and well-rounded citizens. The students need to understand that when they leave school, they will be entering into the workforce and their learning will not end. They not only need to know their subject matter, need to be able to communicate ideas, make good decisions, also learn on their own. Their communication skills will need to be high and fine tuned. Problem solving, punctuality, and trustworthiness will be in high demand. I demonstrate these in my classroom through modeling. I expect my students to try to think through a

problem and determine solutions before asking me how to do something. I strive to be on time to class, and students know that they will be counted late in my class. Students know they can confide in me and that I will use good judgment in using the information. Gaining student trust is something that takes a lot of time.

On the first day of each of my classes, I make my expectations known to the students. I have high demands and will not settle for anything less. Students know that I want respect and in return will give them respect. I have found that once students know that I am going to treat them with respect, they will usually follow suit.

I find teaching very rewarding. When students master a task, it is a great feeling to know that I have assisted them. Knowing that I am touching the future is awesome. I have students who email, write, and visit me very often. They thank me for my efforts and not letting them just be mediocre. When students do this, I know that I have made a difference in their lives. I believe my students can do anything they set their minds to do!

"Teaching is a process of continuous learning, application,  
assessment, and refinement."

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It is my fundamental belief that all children can learn. Effective teachers share this belief and respond to it by becoming masters of technique. While passion and inspiration and heart and soul are critical, we can't kid ourselves that they eliminate our need for a solid command of technique. Teachers need to learn, know, and become so well-versed in the fundamentals of teaching that those practices become second nature. Then, when opportunities arise with students, they know they are ready to seize the teachable moment. I believe that teachers must make it their business to develop a strong command of technique. This can be accomplished through a commitment to research, study, collaborate, network, and dialogue with fellow professionals. Teachers must stay updated on the latest findings both from the neuroscience community which is always uncovering new knowledge related to the brain and how it works, and from within the educational community where we continually create and refine innovative instructional strategies. Teaching is a process of continuous learning, application, assessment, and refinement.

Teachers must know their material and how to teach it. There is no excuse for teachers who do not know their State Standards in the year 2003! Beyond

knowing the Standards, teachers must develop meaningful, well-connected plans for teaching those concepts, knowledge, and skills. We must take what we know about how children learn, blend that with a love for kids, and deliver it with the best instructional strategies. As teachers, we deliver *content*, but we **TEACH children**.

Part of our fundamental purpose as educators is to nurture and develop responsible citizens who will perpetuate the democracy in our great land. So, in addition to academic instruction, teachers are also accountable for instilling democratic principles and character qualities of good citizenship in children. To suggest that these ideas are separate from "educating children" is incorrect. Nurturing good citizens is perhaps the highest call of educators today.

In my own teaching experience, I have made these three areas my mission: mastering technique, understanding the brain and connecting to it, and developing responsible citizenship qualities in my students. I am a lifelong learner who is not content to sit back and rest on what I know today. My educational history shows that I am a perpetual student, seeking knowledge that might help me become better. I am fascinated by brain research and do my best to stay updated on current



neuroscience findings. Then, I take that knowledge and weave it into everything I do in an effort to provide the best possible experience for my students.

I strive to deliver meaningful curriculum in a classroom environment where citizenship skills are expected and modeled daily. My classroom is one where mutual respect, caring, and compassion are evident. I take the time each year to teach the LIFESKILLS (a character education program) and create behavior procedures with students so there is no question about the kind of behavior, language, and attitude that I expect. This multi-faceted combination works! Not only do students demonstrate high levels of academic achievement, but they also develop good relationships and enjoy coming to school each day. I work hard to create that nurturing, yet challenging environment in my classroom, showing the kids that it is possible—we can treat people right and do the right thing! We do it every day.

For me, the greatest rewards of teaching are not monetary prizes, public recognition, certificates or plaques on the wall; rather they are intrinsic. This year, I was honored by being named the most “influential educator” by my former student and one of Mishawaka High School’s 2003 valedictorians, Breeana Gregory. In her written statement, she shared that I taught her to love school and to love learning. She remembered being happy in my classroom. What more could a teacher ask for than to inspire the love

of learning and memories of happiness? Therein lies the greatest reward of all, knowing that I have touched the life of a child in a positive way.

**"Great teachers are involved in the total school program."**

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Those who have been involved in athletics, long ago figured out that an athlete has a far better chance of reaching their potential under the supervision and guidance of a strong coach. My basic teaching philosophy is derived from that same concept. I firmly believe that all students need and deserve a coach in the classroom. That is my job.

As a coach in the classroom, I must play a variety of roles throughout the year. There are times when I need to be a motivator when a student is lazy, a guide when the path is unclear, an encourager to the frustrated, an instructor in new skills, a cheerleader with the victorious, and a reorganizer after a defeat. I make an extra effort to realize the abilities, limitations, and potential of my students. As any good coach, I strive to treat all students fairly, but very few students the same. A coach must always have a plan and a backup, and be willing to abandon both if the situation calls for it. That is what I try to emulate in my classroom.

Being a quality coach/teacher also requires that one understand that this position does not start and end with the daily school bells. It requires a broad sense of commitment to the school, it's

programs, and the community. Teaching is so encompassing that it requires that we live all of our lives in such a way that we can serve as a positive example to others. Great teachers are involved in the total school program. They put their talents to use to further the profession, support extra curricular activities, and improve the fabric of the community.

Excellent teachers understand that learning is a collaborative process. They create a sense of community and pride in their classroom. They work with and learn from other staff members, share ideas, and collectively with the other school professionals, raise the performance expectations and the standards of achievement for their school.

I believe that teachers have an obligation to be demanding in the classroom. Great teachers expect more and get more out of students than others. In their personal lives, great teachers set and reach goals for the improvement of their own skills and abilities. These teachers never quit learning, never quit pushing, and never quit loving what they do. By word, by example, and by modeling behavior they get their students to understand that anything worth doing is worth doing well.

I work hard at being one of those excellent teachers. I put my talents and energies into school projects that I believe are going to have the greatest impact on students and their learning. I volunteer for many staff leadership positions and enjoy working with my supervisors, peers, and classroom parents. When my students see me go the extra mile for them, they are much more accepting of my demands that they too, do only their best work.

**"I feel that my role as an educator includes being a resource  
for my parents as well as my students."**

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I often take time to reflect upon and refine my teaching philosophy. Fortunately, my husband is also an educator, and we often discuss the importance of education and strategies for improvement. My philosophy has been greatly affected by the work of Alfie Kohn and the Child Development Project (CDP) in Oakland, California. The CDP defines the school community as:

A community where caring and trust are emphasized above restrictions and threats, where unity and pride replace winning and losing, and where each person is asked, helped, and inspired to live up to such ideals and values as kindness, fairness, and responsibility. A classroom community seeks to meet each student's need to feel competent, connected to others, and autonomous ... students are not only exposed to basic human values, they also have many opportunities to think about, discuss, and act on those values, while gaining experiences that promote empathy and understanding of others.

In my classroom, one can see evidence of this definition in the many visual cues that speak to the values I try to foster in my students. I do not offer rewards nor do I dictate consequences, rather I create lessons that are inquiry based and build on prior knowledge. I facilitate a feeling of belonging and help students create a learning environment that empowers

them to set goals and expectations, I mediate personal conflicts, and I model the values I promote.

Art is a natural bridge that ties together different aspects of education. The art projects I devise approach standards visually and creatively. For many students, art is one of the only places they find success. Many students have learning disabilities and struggle with core subjects, but by presenting the subjects in a visual, hands-on manner, these students can make connections and be successful. This builds the students' self-esteem, and they are more willing to take risks with learning. At the other end of the spectrum, high-achieving students sometimes are bored with the regular curriculum, and this often leads to behavior problems. I offer unique art challenges that motivate the student and enhance the core subjects.

I feel what makes me an outstanding teacher also gives me the largest rewards: taking time to make personal connections with each of my students. By reaching out to their families and helping them overcome adversity, students discover the joy of learning and the power of community. One unique characteristic of being an art teacher is that I know all of the kids and I am able to connect with siblings to gain a larger understanding of

their family dynamics. If I have a student who is despondent, I may ask the sibling why his or her brother was so sad that morning, which enables me to make a personal connection in a manner that is non-confrontational. It shows both students that I am concerned and want to help. In doing so, I am able to instill responsibility for not only themselves but for one another. I also attend outside events that the students are involved in and offer after-school mentoring to help students achieve personal goals. For example, I stay after school three days a week in the fall to help students who are trying out for the high school visual art magnet program create their portfolios and prepare for their interviews. I also worked with one of my students to get ready for a Star Search audition. She called me several times that weekend with updates, and she knew that, regardless of the outcome, she will always be a star to me.

By knowing all the students, I can help the teachers gain a better perspective on external forces that may affect learning. Once we identify problems, we can work together to develop interdisciplinary units that engage students on many different levels, making learning more meaningful. The CFI staff works hard to understand child development, and we strongly believe in hands on learning that is founded on the proven methods of inquiry-based learning. We work together to survey the interest of the students and then build integrated units that involve the related arts and the standards. This

year, I developed a yearlong unit entitled World Quest that was based on our schoolwide goal of problem solving. The unit explores cultural arts, and the projects employ different problem solving strategies. It addresses the fine art standards and the grade level standards and links to themes the classroom teachers are exploring. Working together not only creates more exciting, valuable learning, it models cooperation and collaboration that are essential for success.

Working in the arts also encourages parental involvement. Teaching in an urban district, parents are more likely to be burdened by everyday survival, and many struggle to maintain a positive outlook. Therefore, I try to offer moments of joy and opportunities by nurturing creativity in their children. I feel that my role as an educator includes being a resource for my parents as well as my students. I am open to questions and criticism and constantly strive to improve. Parents know their children best, and by working together, we can help that child bloom.

I know that as I continue to teach, I will continue to refine my skills. I possess a tireless commitment to public education, my colleagues, and our community. I hope that by putting my heart into my work, my students will achieve, and they will know that I care greatly about their futures.

**Rebekah Dawn Elder**  
**Southwest Allen County Schools**  
**Woodside Middle School**  
**Language Arts, Grade 8**

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**"Sometimes I have to veer off of the lesson plan to capture a teachable moment because curiosity is what drives the ambition to learn."**

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My philosophy is to never take the commitment of being a teacher lightly. While students may not remember how to dissect a sentence twenty years from today, they will remember how I made them feel when they sat in the desks in my room. Students have a hard time learning when they do not feel valued. My first goal is to allow students to realize they are important to me when they are in my classroom, in the hallway, or out in public.

I am passionate about helping students to become caring participants in this world. My job goes beyond the instruction of Language Arts. Intelligence is wonderful, but brilliant individuals wrote anti-Semitic propaganda and designed crematoriums. I want the students to think about others as well as themselves. I am concerned with who they are today and who they will be in thirty years.

To accomplish this awareness, I remind the students that learning should not be contained in a classroom. I encourage them to go beyond novels that we read to find a personal connection. I want students to relate to the assignments we do so that they see a higher purpose for completing them. I cultivate questions and then play the devil's advocate so students think and get involved. I attempt to

stimulate students to find their voices in an appropriate way. I want students to learn how to advocate for themselves respectfully. Students need to have opinions and apply information rather than to accept positions that require only apathy. Becoming a lifetime learner is a process of encouragement.

I am not a teacher who places the limitations of my teaching abilities on the home lives of my students. I cannot blame the home if a student fails to achieve; I blame me. I want students to end the year knowing something they can do better as a result of having been in my class. I encourage each student to reach for his or her personal best. This means that differentiation is a critical element in my lesson plans. Students decide what topics they are interested in exploring in research papers, and I become the learner as I read their thought provoking thesis statements and topics of interest. I do not believe in passive learning; students need to be intrigued, involved, inquisitive, and take ownership in their learning. This is not an easy task in the eighth grade, so I try to create an environment that transforms a student who asks a question into the class hero. How can students learn when they don't care to understand? Sometimes I have to veer off of the lesson plan to capture a teachable moment

because curiosity is what drives the ambition to learn. My students need to have voices, thoughts, opinions, criticisms, and compliments. We hold each other to high standards.

I walk the walk. I am a role model because I am a teacher. I have taken on a career that places in me in the lives of others, and I want to accomplish the most possible with my position. Due to this, I write when I ask students to write. I read, and I discuss the books that I am reading in my free time. Students need to know that I don't preach about the importance of reading and writing—I live it. Teachers cannot get away with the idea of "Do as I say, not as I do." I am fortunate to have a love for language. Students see that. They know when teachers believe in their subjects and are passionate about teaching. I want them to look at me and know that reading, writing, and learning extend beyond the school years.

I set the bar high because students are capable of reaching the goals I set. I would rather a student try and fail than to be successful at all times because the material was not rigorous or challenging. Where would our world be without the failures of Albert Einstein? More importantly, I want students to learn how to rise above failures in order to gain learning experiences. What students learn in my classroom can be used in every classroom—writing and reading go beyond the Language Arts curriculum.

In order to accomplish all of the above I believe in a lot of laughter, a lot of thinking, a lot of rigor, and a lot of discussion. All students are capable of learning. Every student can make the choice to be successful and become a positive contribution to our community. I do not accept the status quo. I do not accept that some students cannot be reached. My goal is to extend myself beyond barriers to reach all students. I want them to know that they are the reason I get up in the morning and walk into the school. I am here for their betterment.

I have an opportunity to change lives every time I go to work; how many people can say that? Every successful person stands on the shoulders of at least one, inspiring teacher.

**Amy Ellinghausen**  
**Eastern School District of Greene County**  
**Eastern District Elementary School**  
**Math and English, Grade 6**

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**"We should exhibit an intense dedication to our students  
and a great passion for the subjects we teach."**

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Teachers have such an incredible responsibility in this world. We are the ones who are entrusted to educate future generations. We are the ones who must be the surrogate mother or father when our students' parents do not care or are not available. We are the ones who must worry about kids' self-esteem and encourage them to feel confident and motivated to do their personal best. We are the ones who must teach all who come to us—we cannot "fire" the unmotivated, difficult ones. We are the ones who open doors for our students and let them experience a world beyond their homes. We are the ones who must teach children to treat others with respect so our world can become a better place.

In order to fulfill all of these responsibilities, teachers must do several things. We should exhibit an intense dedication to our students and a great passion for the subjects we teach. Having high expectations (academically, behaviorally, socially, and emotionally) of all students regardless of their abilities or backgrounds is crucial. It is also important for teachers to be able to motivate and inspire all students—even the most unwilling ones. Teachers must be able to work well as a team with other teachers, teaching assistants, parents, and administrators. It is necessary for teachers

to teach state standards thoroughly and successfully to students, but we should do so in a relevant, enjoyable way. Continuing to learn about new educational practices, providing real-life applications of subject matter, being facilitators of learning, and keeping our students actively engaged in learning are all important actions we must make in order to help our students succeed. Teachers also need to provide many opportunities for students to work together and learn from one another. We must encourage kids to think for themselves, become better problem solvers, and be curious about the world around them. Finally, we must help teach kids life skills, making them realize the importance of responsibility, integrity, compassion, and respect.

Those who are able to successfully implement all of these practices are outstanding teachers, in my opinion. In my daily teaching, I constantly strive to conduct myself in this manner so I can fulfill all of the responsibilities that I believe teachers have in our society. I use the following saying as a guide for my daily actions with my students to help me remember there is much more to teaching than simply teaching subject matter: "Kids don't care what you think until they think you care." Outstanding teachers are



able to radiate this caring toward their students and show a genuine interest in students' lives. When teachers do this, students realize they are respected and valued, and, in turn, they strive to work to their full potential and learn the necessary subject material.

Teachers certainly do have great responsibilities, but, fortunately for us, if we are successful in our attempts at fulfilling these responsibilities, we reap incredible rewards. We are the ones who see the spark in students' eyes when they finally learn a concept with which they have struggled over and over. We are the ones who see students persevere and finally find satisfaction when they finish the final draft of a paper they have revised seven times because they wanted it to be "just perfect." We are the ones who see the shy child learn to feel secure enough to voluntarily answer questions in class. We are the ones who receive an unexpected thank you note in the middle of the day saying, "You are my favorite teacher of all. Thank you for staying on me even when I was bad." We are the ones who receive a note from a parent saying, "You have taken a child who has hated math and had to struggle with it from day one and helped her find enjoyment within its learning process." We are the ones who have the great fortune of positively influencing future generations and making the world a better place.

**"I feel successful when students evaluate their own participation  
in an activity and feel validated."**

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I was once told that leadership does not always go according to plan, it is not easy, and it is a job that never ends. I believe that being a successful educator means one must take on the role of a leader, a strong leader of change, a leader of equal opportunity, and a leader of life-long learning.

A strong leader of change has to be flexible enough to seek a solution and be willing to make the situation better by trying something new. I feel that I consistently reevaluate my teaching and seek new opportunities to make myself a better teacher and a better person. I appreciate the feedback I receive from the evaluations of my peers and my principal. The TAP program has given me an avenue to evaluate my teaching on a regular basis. I understand my students' frustrations when my class has a community circle to talk about obstacles in the classroom. I try to stay open-minded and seek better solutions to difficult problems. In the end, I feel most rewarded when a student understands a concept, a colleague feels reassured, and I can create better lessons from personal assessment.

A leader of equal opportunity has to strive to differentiate learning, encourage every student to participate, and appreciate

differences in each individual. I find it very challenging and equally important to educate each student on their level using different techniques like Gardner's multiple intelligences. I create lessons with each student's need in mind so that they feel successful and challenged. I want my students to feel that they have met their full potential and can take pride in their accomplishments. I feel successful when students evaluate their own participation in an activity and feel validated.

Most importantly an educator must be a model for life-long learning. I am involved in various activities, clubs, and service work where I invite the student to learn with me. We have many discussions about issues in the world. I make it understandable and memorable for them by making the activities meaningful. An example of a favorite lesson that exemplifies this quality was having the students create a courtroom to defend or prosecute Rosa Parks. They had to use the constitution, Jim Crow Laws, and other means to support their case. We talked about issues similar in the present where these laws or morals are tested. I had sixty-six future lawyers ready to discuss amendments and laws on a daily basis. Those moments remind me that teaching

is about modeling life-long learning in various meaningful ways that allow the students to see purpose in their personal lives.

Being an educator is a continuous process of evaluation and spirit. I want to be the best at my profession and take my leadership role as a teacher very seriously. I am a leader of change, a leader of opportunity, and a leader of life-long learning.

"I want them to be risk-takers,  
and not be afraid to ask why or why not."

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*"We learn not for school but for life."*

I always knew I was going to be a teacher. I believe teachers touch the hearts and minds of their students. There is no telling how much influence we have on them each and every minute of every day. I had some wonderful teachers who taught me that I am important and that what I have to say is important. They taught me not to set limits on what I can do, but to set goals for what I wish to achieve and then to remember to keep focused on those goals in all that I do. It is the student's self-esteem that matters most. Teachers must help the students understand that they do have a voice and that their actions can make an impact on the world around them. It is imperative that we as teachers remember the influence that we have on our students and to treat every child with dignity and respect always.

I am a believer that every student who comes before me can and will learn. I also know that in a classroom of 20 students I have 20 individuals, each with his or her own personality, level of ability, expectations, hopes, and dreams for the school year ahead. I help my students to set goals for themselves and then I motivate them to achieve those goals. All of this is geared toward meeting the

Indiana State standards set for third grade. I work to align my teaching strategies to the standards in order to ensure that my students have that chance to achieve what is necessary for their future success.

I believe literacy is another key that will open up the door to success for my students, therefore reading and written expression are integrated throughout my curriculum in a variety of ways such as using author circles, literature groups, and sustained-silent reading times. I enjoy reading aloud to my class everyday as well.

Different students learn in different ways, so I strive to meet their learning needs with a variety of teaching strategies that touch on many different learning modalities. I use project-based learning as much as I can in my classroom. In this way my students can see the relevance to their own lives of what they are learning. Project-based learning allows the students a more active role so they can feel ownership of their own learning. They must learn to collaborate and communicate with their peers in order to see the project through to its finish. The skills the students use in this process will benefit them for life.

I also tell my students that there are no “silly” questions. I want them to be risk-takers, and not be afraid to ask why or why not. Instilling in them the idea that they have a voice and what they say is important is of high priority in my classroom.

A tool that I integrate as much as I can is technology, in particular computers, multi-media, and the Internet. I have never seen a tool as motivational or as effective as the Internet! Teaching students how to process and analyze the data they find on the Internet is a most needed skill now. This skill also lends itself well to the students’ published work on the Internet. Students work extra hard to make what they write the best it can be when they know that they will have an audience that is worldwide who will be critically reading and analyzing their own work. I know that in teaching my students these skills I am guiding them to be life-long learners.

To me teaching is the core to our future. I know that what I do with my students is not a waste of time, and never will be. Every moment is a teachable moment. When I look into the eyes of my students I know I am looking into our future. I feel the responsibility of that and I embrace it. Teaching is for me the ultimate way to make a positive impact on our society. In other words, teaching is where the action is!

**"Every batch of students is unique so I have to change with them."**

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My philosophy of teaching consists of three parts. 1. Everyone can learn so raise the level of expectation. 2. Treat children with respect, they are people, so love them. 3. Create an environment where they can feel smart and as safe as possible.

First, I don't believe that there are "dumb" kids. I shake my head and roll my eyes every time I hear a fellow teacher refer to a student as "dumb", "stupid", or "one of those." I believe that we are all smart. We are humans. So, with that in mind I expect a lot from all of my students in my classes.

I am not saying that I don't make the necessary modifications for those students who need a little boost. I do. I work with our special education teacher and IEPs just like all the other teachers do. But I don't expect any less.

I believe that most students will work as hard as they have to in order to achieve the grade they have decided to get. So one student who wants an A, will work until he/she gets it. And another student who just wants to pass will work however hard he/she has to do that. So, I play a trick on them and expect more. Therefore, they learn more than they intended.

Second, I try so hard to treat my students like I would want to be treated. I don't make fun of them. I don't yell and scream at them. I don't patronize them. I treat them as God's children and He is one parent I wouldn't want to offend. I encourage them and listen to them. They have really good ideas about life and about what to do in class. I use their ideas as much as possible. I am not perfect, but this is what I strive for.

My third belief is the most difficult to implement. Because my students come from all different kinds of homes every morning, it is hard to even out the level of safety. I want my students to feel like they can try hard in my class and not worry about anyone making fun of them. I have discussions with students who tend to laugh at other students. Those who make fun usually stop.

I don't even want to know all the horrors that may go on in the homes of my students, but when they come to my class I smile at them, say their name and I try my best to let them know that I care about them. Maybe, just maybe, I can help them to forget about their troubles for just 68 minutes a day.

I want my kids to feel smart because they are. I use many forms of positive reinforcement such as stickers, stamps, and ribbons. At the end of the year. I award all the students who had perfect quizzes. They get an award that tells how many they had that year. They really like this. And in every class, everyone gets one because it seems everyone had at least one perfect quiz.

This coming school year, I plan to use “pesos” to encourage speaking Spanish in the classroom. I got this idea from Señora K at Winchester High School. I observed her for part of one of my personal days. I get all of my ideas from other teachers.

I have a lot to learn about teaching. I will learn about my students as well. They seem to be different every year. Every batch of students is unique so I have to change with them. But one thing doesn't ever change. My students all show me what I come to school to see. The lightbulb is the one that pops over their heads when they “get it.” I can see that lightbulb. That is what I love the most about teaching.

**Charlene Handzel**  
**Salem Community Schools**  
**Bradie Shrum Lower Elementary School**  
**Kindergarten**

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"I believe in providing protection  
from adverse consequences for failures."

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Teaching is not my job or career, it is my passion. When I student taught, I believed third grade must be the best age group with which to work. I then obtained a second grade classroom and realized that I had found the perfect grade level. After relocating to the state of Indiana, my assignment found me within the walls of a first grade group of children, but before I could blink, the year was over, reassignments were made and I landed in front of a room full of fifth graders. I discovered paradise! I never wanted to leave the curriculum or the age group. Well, after eighteen years, the wind blew that door shut and opened the window to the world of kindergarten; and in the words of Louis Armstrong, "Oh, What A Wonderful World It Is!"

After some soul searching and writing of essays for postgraduate work, I came to the realization that each grade level offered me magnificent opportunities and it was my responsibility to respond with my best. That was when the depth of my commitment was finally exposed to me; my husband told me he knew all along—by the time and effort I devoted to classroom activities during the school year and the summer. I just knew there were many things I wanted to do for my students and I enjoyed doing them.

My personal philosophy is "children first." Whatever is in the best interest of the child is my personal goal. The next important part of my philosophy includes communicating and involving the family as much as possible. I am their partner during this formal education process for only 180 school days and the family unit is a lifelong teacher of its children. I share with them and their children as much of my expertise, formal training, and whatever research I can locate for them as possible; but when their children leave my room, I no longer have the strong influence to teach, guide and train them, so I must work hard to create as trusting a relationship as possible. I send home a procedural handbook at the beginning of the year, monthly "homework" calendars, and elaborate weekly newsletters. Additionally, I visit with family units when they bring or pick up their children and make regular phone calls.

My philosophy expands with the belief in treating students with respect. I believe that when actively engaged in meaningful activities, learning takes place and discipline is not an issue. I believe in providing protection from adverse consequences for failures. Within my lessons, I strive for product focus, clear and compelling product standards, novelty and variety, choice, and



authenticity. When there is affiliation, the children learn from each other's strengths and affirmation of peers is spontaneous and genuine.

A fourth and integral ingredient of my philosophy is that I incorporate a great deal of children's literature into my daily teaching. There are several titles I perennially share not only with the children but with other professionals as well. The stories are delightful and have meaningful messages. Because of the age level, *The Kissing Hand* by Audrey Penn is an excellent choice for first time school experience or possible separation anxiety. *The Crayon Box that Talked* by Sharie DeRolf for acceptance and appreciation of diversity is appropriate for all ages. *You Are Special* by Max Lucado is a wonderful selection for not allowing how others view us influence our happiness. One of my newest favorites is *Giraffes Can't Dance* by Giles Andreae. This book helps teach children that they can accomplish difficult tasks by trying different strategies. I share it with educators with the challenge that children can accomplish difficult tasks when teachers, find the strategy that works best for them.

A fifth, but equally important, element of my teaching philosophy is that my classroom is designed to incorporate many teaching techniques into each day; and I labor to learn favorite individual learning modalities to accommodate for different needs and styles of each child.

**"My goal is to make the students believe that they are capable of understanding the difficult math concepts if they work hard."**

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As I stated previously in my professional biography, the reactions I receive from people when I tell them I teach high school math for a living are always interesting. People often say things such as "I always hated math when I was in school" or "I can't imagine working with the teen-agers of today." My philosophy of teaching is that while working with high school age teen-agers can be challenging, it can also be a rewarding and enjoyable experience. Furthermore, I strive to make math not the despicable subject as many people view it, but a worthwhile, challenging, and even enjoyable subject.

I believe that the secret to my success in the high school classroom is that I maintain an environment of mutual respect. Mutual respect, of course, involves the two parts of me respecting my students and my students respecting me. I try to respect my students by treating them like young adults. I do not dwell on their shortcomings, but look for and emphasize their positive attributes. I try not to judge them on what they are now as they go through their awkward teen-age years. Instead, I strive to be a positive part of the process that leads them to be successful young adults. The other part of the equation is that my students need to respect me. This is not as easy, but I believe my efforts to respect them can only

help the process. Furthermore, I make an effort to know each student on a personal level. In a small school population like ours most of the students are involved in some, and often many, extra-curricular activities. Although I live approximately 30 miles from the school, I often am in the stands on a weekend night boys basketball game or weekday night girls game. I remember countless freezing Friday nights when I had truly planned on spending the evening at home, but sometime during the day one of my football players/math students asked "Mrs. Harter, are you coming to the game tonight?" And yes, I shivered through football season too. I try to attend them all at least once, the volleyball games, the wrestling matches, the band performances, the school play, and everything else throughout the year. I realize that for some students extra-curricular school activities are not an option. They must hold down jobs to help pay for cars and insurance. I try to know where they work, and ask how it is going. While I understand that every student may not like me, I am constantly striving for his or her respect.

Once I have established an environment of respect, I now get to teach a subject that I have always loved. Unfortunately, not everyone feels the same way about math

classes. My teaching assignment this year was Geometry, Pre-calculus, and Calculus. These classes are filled with difficult and abstract concepts for many students. I often notice that students seem to understand these advanced mathematical concepts while I am explaining them, but then seem to go blank when asked to do them on their own. Therefore, I attempt to structure my lesson plans so that students have ample opportunity to practice a new concept before they leave my classroom. I try to make these practice opportunities as fun as possible. My “bag of tricks” for practicing math includes games such as “math basketball” and lots of group activities. Of course, I encourage my students to ask questions when they don’t understand. My door is open before and after school for students to get extra help when they need it. My goal is to make the students believe that they are capable of understanding the difficult math concepts if they work hard.

**Julie Hertel**  
**Fayette County School Corporation**  
**Fayette Central Elementary**  
**Hearing Impaired, Preschool — Language Arts, Grade 3**

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**"An outstanding teacher is one who shows the ability to teach  
as well as facilitate."**

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An outstanding teacher is one who shows the ability to teach as well as facilitate. This teacher is a life long learner who exhibits patience, flexibility, kindness and is committed to educating children. I believe these traits describe myself as a teacher.

My classroom has a positive atmosphere with a homey, safe and comfortable feeling. The children move about the room as they explore their hands on learning centers. The children are motivated and are actively engaged in learning at all times. The activities provided stimulate their thinking, encourage them to test new ideas and materials, allow them to make choices, help them develop a sense of responsibility and help them to express their opinions and feelings. I find myself being a facilitator as well as an instructor. My lessons encourage independence, self-direction and collaboration. I provide support to the children as needed allowing for individual differences as instruction is implemented. I provide a classroom with a positive climate of openness, mutual respect, support and inquiry.

My classroom is unique in that the children are individuals with a wide variety of needs. The children are three years of age to twelve years of age, which creates a diverse environment. My

primary responsibility is to work with the younger children (Preschool-3<sup>rd</sup>). I believe in being flexible and patient. I have taught the children these skills also. My classroom is a very busy place and these two life skills help to create a more relaxing atmosphere. I believe the children are individual learners and my activities allow for such differences.

Each child has individual goals. Even though the activity may be the same, the outcome for each child is unique to their learning capabilities. This allows for each child to learn at the pace they feel comfortable with and learn to the best of their abilities.

As a teacher of children with special needs, the rewards occur for me daily. Seeing the sparkle in their eyes as they learn keeps me motivated to be the best that I can be. Watching them learn to read and keep pace with their regular education peers, provides me with the feelings of pride and achievement. The children's accomplishments, both big and small, are celebrated daily. The children's successes are my greatest rewards.



**Rebecca L. Hindman**  
**Madison-Grant United School Corporation**  
**Park Elementary School**  
**Special Education, Grades K-5**

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"Goals are of the utmost importance in creating  
a desire to learn in children."

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"Begin with the end in mind" which is a quote of Stephen Covey's has stood the test of time for me. Parents, teachers and other staff members need to establish a set of goals for children and help children plan and strive to reach their own short and long term goals. With the *No Child Left Behind Act* we are encouraged to track, evaluate and plan for the eventual success of each child we teach. Goals are of the utmost importance in creating a desire to learn in children. Once goals are established, children can become involved in their own education thus creating a feeling of ownership.

Children need and expect adults to provide an education that meets their individual learning styles. It is of extreme importance that teachers and administrators develop curriculums and extra programs to meet individual learning styles. One of the best ways to accomplish this goal is for continued and encouraged quality staff development.

Children need and rightly expect adults to create a safe and comfortable environment in which to learn. This perhaps is the easiest and yet the hardest promise to keep. It is necessary for the entire school staff and community to

continually improve the learning environment and to maintain a careful watch over the administration of safety.

Attention to the above three areas, my love for and belief in the value and potential of all children and their parents/guardians in addition to my desire to continually learn new and improved methods, test theories and share success or concerns with my peers contribute to my success as a teacher. My style of teaching is founded in the belief that it takes the entire community to produce in a nurturing way proficient adults for future community development.

A master teacher is like a tree with a good root system. I have the support of my students, their parents/guardians, my peers, the school support staff and the administration. These people demonstrate their belief that I am capable of educating the citizens of tomorrow. What tree with that type of support would choose to wilt and die? This continued support is the ultimate reward in teaching.



**Dawn E. Holbrook**  
**Mooreville Consolidated School Corporation**  
**North Madison Elementary School**  
**Music Education, Grades 1-6 — Choir, Grades 5-6**

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"I care for every child that walks through any door each day."

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There can be no other profession so challenging, on a daily basis, than that of a teacher. We are entrusted with a parent's most precious treasure, responsible for their safety, accountable for their academic education, and a guide for their future. At the same time, this challenge brings a rewarding sense of pride to all those who stand before a classroom of curious, energetic students, who, like sponges, seek to soak every last ounce of information from their surroundings.

We have an immense job and a responsibility to our future, to build strong, intelligent minds, enabling our children to thrive in society with confidence and perseverance toward their endeavors. I believe every child deserves that right. Not all children come to us in the best of circumstances. Some enter our schools with very little love or support, needing someone to give structure to their lives. A teacher must demonstrate his or her strength of character, self-control, discipline, empathy, humor, and kindness. We never fully know how we are perceived by students and the impact we have on their lives.

There is no greater joy in teaching, than to have a student who has struggled with a concept for weeks or months, suddenly

fly to his or her feet; eyes wide, a smiling face from ear to ear and proclaim to all, "I get it, I get it, this is so easy!" I have never been more proud of what I do, than to have attended this year's talent show. A young student, who had been required to master a piano solo for a music class grade, chose her "test song", as her talent. What a gift I had given to her. What a compliment she had given to me.

I feel what makes me an outstanding teacher can be stated with two very simple words. I care! I care for every child that walks through any door each day. I hug them, I tell them I love them, I discipline them when needed, and I am fair. North Madison students know that I have high expectations for them, believing that they are capable of achieving well beyond what is expected, if given the opportunity. Because my students are young, they are sometimes perceived to be too immature to handle responsibility, or complex tasks. Children are incredible! They are amazing little creatures that hunger for the unknown. They want the experience of a challenge and the excitement of success. I feel I offer this to my students. My students are asked to complete such critical thinking skills as improvising music, analyzing musical forms, critiquing a musical performance, performing alone and with others,



memorizing literature, and singing in a foreign language, just to name a few.

North Madison students also perform three full musicals a year. They are involved in every aspect of the performance. Students help create props, scenery, memorize dialogue, staging, and music. Students even serve as stage crew, back stage assistants, and work with special effects. Many people might fear this would not be possible with children as young as seven, but my students work very hard and know that I will support them. It is my desire, they will learn that “through hard work, comes great success.”

Our job as teachers is to find a way to bring knowledge to children, in a way that all can understand. With that knowledge, children can gain a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. When that happens, learning happens. We, as teachers not only impart knowledge but we must create a safe, loving environment, free of personal criticism, where a child can feel secure enough to fail, strong enough to pursue and determined enough to follow their dreams.

**"It is necessary to get to know the learning needs of each student."**

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It is the obligation of every teacher to become aware of the developmental level of every student in his/her charge. Every child deserves to be met at his/her instructional level. It is important that the materials used in this educational effort be flexible enough to enable each child to be successful. By using different materials and teaching strategies as needed, a teacher will ensure student learning. It is also important to become aware of the learning standards for the grade level to set ongoing learning goals. These standards then must be incorporated into the curriculum for each student's academic plan.

Classroom management is extremely important to successful learning. Students must be in a learning environment in which they feel safe to take educational risks. It is necessary to teach life skills in conjunction with academic information. When students learn self-control, active listening skills, respect for themselves and others, and how to study, they become successful learners. It is important to help students to become aware that they are responsible for their educational growth.

It is necessary to get to know the learning needs of each student. It is helpful to become informed about any part of their

lives that affects their learning. As a teacher acquires personal knowledge about a child, it helps in preparing individualized learning experiences. It is equally important to discover the personal interests of each child because this will help guide him/her into successful academic activities.

Accepting the different interests and styles of learning has always enabled me to facilitate student learning. Maintaining a learning atmosphere where the students have been comfortable in their learning endeavors has contributed to a successful classroom atmosphere. It has always been a goal of mine to help each child believe in his/her ability to be a successful learner.

It is my belief that teachers must continue to become informed in current best educational practices in order to be effective in the classroom. There are numerous opportunities for staff development. As student needs continue to challenge me as an educator, I search for various approaches to meet them. I have continued to attend seminars and workshops in search of different educational approaches. Working with other staff members in team situations has been very valuable to me. It has always been important to continually

discuss, with other professionals, possible solutions to educational problems. Throughout my career, I have chosen to work in team teaching situations when possible. I have learned many approaches from my colleagues, and I feel that I have been a contributing member as well.

There is no greater reward than being a classroom teacher. Working with children as they learn is very challenging, but to be a part of that learning is a most satisfying profession. Teachers have a tremendous impact on the students with whom they work. It is imperative that each teacher prepares himself/herself at the highest level possible to do this job successfully.

**"My philosophy stems from my belief that all children learn differently,  
but all children can learn."**

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Teaching allows me to share with students that they have the ability to shape their own destiny regardless of the circumstances that surround them. Teaching offers me the daily challenge of providing stimulating experiences that meet my students' individual needs. Each day I enter my classroom I become a nurse, a computer master, a sports star on the playground, a comedian, a mother, and a counselor. I can be anything my students need me to be in any situation. I believe it is a blessing from God to be able to teach.

My philosophy stems from my belief that all children learn differently, but all children can learn. It is my job as a teacher to understand the ways that students learn and adapt my lessons to incorporate a variety of learning styles.

I was told my first year of teaching that this would be the most challenging year of my career. Once I prepared my lessons for that year, my worries would be over because I could use those plans the following year. What I found out quickly was to be the teacher I wanted to be, each year became just as challenging.

My lessons change with each new group of students. I meet students where they are when they enter my classroom. I do

this through ongoing assessments and getting to know each child individually. I differentiate through the use of tiered lessons and student choice. I find the strengths of each child and I begin to focus on this strength. The students showcase their talents through teaching and modeling for struggling learners. Because each child has strengths, they all have the opportunity to teach their peers. A child's weakness becomes a learning opportunity and is no longer viewed as an inhibitor to the learning process. Students play an active role in their own education. Lessons must become meaningful and relevant to their daily lives.

Students must feel a sense of safety in the classroom. They must feel free to make mistakes and know that they are a vital part of the learning process. Students guide my teaching daily through their questions and interests. If I can not capture the minds of my students, then I have already lost them. I believe in challenging each child daily. If I do not push them to become better than they are, then they are stuck and my teaching becomes meaningless.

In being an inclusion teacher since my career began, four years ago, I have had to work with students on all different levels using the same set of standards and

curriculum. I spend much of my time educating myself about the best ways to meet the needs of my students. It is every teacher's responsibility to understand their students' fully, otherwise we can not educate them well.

I strive each day to excite the unexcited, motivate the unmotivated, make a child smile in times of sadness, and teach trust to those who have never had anything or anyone to trust. These are the true rewards of teaching. I truly feel that to be a natural teacher, I must know that it wasn't me who chose teaching, but teaching that chose me.

**R. Denise Jacobs**  
**Richland Bean Blossom Community Schools**  
**Edgewood Primary School**  
**Grades 1 and 2**

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**"My rewards come in seeing the progress children and parents make  
when I can take all I know and am learning to help them be more  
successful in their goals."**

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In discussing my personal beliefs about teaching I think of the multifaceted career that it is. The teaching profession, like the medical profession is a complicated arena. Yes, there are scientific facts, procedures and strategies. But there is something more that the professional needs to provide that embraces the learner, nurtures the learner, and in collaboration launches the learner to be all-sufficient in his/her life journey.

To be truly effective the professional, the teacher or the doctor, must observe and treat the patient/learner as a whole. All systems of the patient/learner must be in sync for the best possible process. The teacher/physician must be equipped with the resources, strategies, wisdom, and understanding to lead the learner/patient to mastery of the standards or better health.

An analogy that comes to mind is that of comparing two paintings. One is a paint by number project. The other is created by the artist. A "paint-by-number" teacher can fulfill the requirements to be a teacher, children will learn, but, it is not the same as the true art of teaching. Some professionals in education have that innate characteristic that produces the artist teacher. You can feel it the minute you meet them.

Characteristic of this artist of teaching include: keeping up to date on the current research; meeting parents; communicating with parents regularly; enlist the parent as partners in the class participation; being aware of student needs; respecting the diversity of each client and adult involved; spending the time researching, practicing, in-servicing to learn as much as possible to be that resource able to attend to those diverse needs.

I strive to educate the parents about their importance and responsibility. Each year before school begins I have a small reception to allow us to meet one another, ease the nervousness, and emphasize that the parent is the teacher. I am their resource to help educate their child. I enlist parents to come to the room to volunteer to help children with reading, writing, math, self-esteem, and confidence. We end the year with a big award banquet honoring each child's progress rather than which child is the best at something.

I love to help the child who is struggling. I love to help that child realize his/her capabilities, then utilize that knowledge to break down some of those obstacles. When I have a child who is struggling, I pull out everything I know to determine the best possible strategy to help this

child. If I find that I can not meet the child's needs, I research and seek assistance from colleagues.

In trying to build this reservoir of strategies and resources in the eighties, I found out about Gardner's Seven Intelligences model. A friend and I visited the Key School in Indianapolis. This school was based on Howard Gardiner's philosophy.

In the late eighties my superintendent sent a board member and me to Columbus, Ohio to learn a little about Reading Recovery from Gay Su Pinnell and Irene Fountas. We spent two days asking questions and observing.

In pursuing a "better way" to do it all, I was referred to the Four Block Literacy model. I believe that this model is the most comprehensive framework I have seen. At the present time, I am trying to learn about Dr. Bethanie Tucker's *Tucker Signing Strategies for Reading*. Several of my reluctant readers became confident readers after our resource teacher had used some of the Tucker strategies with them.

My rewards come in seeing the progress children and parents make when I can take all I know and am learning to help them be more successful in their goals. I love to help people. I love to learn. In this profession, I have the privilege to both daily.

**Tracey Michele Kelly**  
**Hamilton Southeastern School Corporation**  
**Hoosier Road Elementary School**  
**Grade 3**

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**"I strive to be a positive role model and  
contribute to the success of each and every child."**

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My greatest belief in education is children need to want to come to school. If I can make learning exciting and meaningful for children they will want to get up in the morning, make the trek on the school bus, and be excited to come through my classroom door each day. I feel once I have all the children in the classroom eager to be there, I can obtain my goal of teaching the required standards with greater ease and exhilaration. If my students trust me and feel non-threatened in the classroom environment, they will be willing to take risks and push themselves beyond their own expected personal limits.

My first task each year is to create a non-threatening classroom. This is usually not easy as it would seem. Each year new students enter my room with a variety of experiences, expectations, abilities, and fears that I must address individually in order to get them to a level of trust. This trust needs to exist between student and teacher as well as student and peers. I spend a great deal of time at the beginning of the school year exploring learning styles as well as level of abilities. I always try to tell the children that it is completely acceptable not to be perfect at everything and that we all learn differently and at different rates. Nobody wants to admit when things are challenging. However, I try to change that feeling in my students.

I want them to feel comfortable vocalizing that certain subjects or activities are more challenging for them, or that it is easier for them to learn in a certain manner. If they can admit this to me and their peers, they are more likely to solicit help when needed, which will allow for mastery of content instead of quietly letting the material slip by.

I continue to encourage trust among peers and myself by being firm, fun, fair and consistent. The children know their limitations and the expectations that I have for them. I am always open and honest with my feelings. My reaction to various situations is never an unknown to my students. They know my policies and know what to expect so they do not fear the unknown consequence. Since the students know what I expect, and what will happen if those expectations are not met, I have very few behavior problems. The children know the consequences and do not want to disappoint me. I have a poster on the wall by my behavior chart that says, "A Mistake is a Chance to Try Harder" and I truly believe this. If children know that I still respect and like them even though they made a bad choice, that day, they are less likely to make those bad choices. Another way I encourage trust is by showing my students that I also know how to lighten up and have a good



time. Students and teachers need to have fun learning and my students and I do that daily. They trust that I will make learning fun and meaningful, not the drudgery of rote memorization and continuous lectures.

My biggest reward is when at first I see children come into my classroom hesitant to raise their hand or make a remark in front of their peers, but by the end of the year they are taking risks and leading discussions. I see children leaving my classroom each year feeling confident that they are ready for the next grade level, and confident in their abilities and what they can accomplish. I love talking to parents at the end of the year and hearing how their child has grown so much from being in my classroom. I love to hear affirmation that their child has matured and become a self-motivated learner. I strive to be a positive role model and contribute to the success of each and every child.

**"I believe that a really good teacher is someone who knows  
that a student can teach and a teacher can learn."**

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The Giver flicked his hand as if brushing something aside, "Oh, your instructors are well trained. They know their scientific facts. Everyone is well trained for his job. It's just that ... without the memories it's all meaningless." "Why do you and I have to hold these memories?" (the boy asked.) "It gives us wisdom," the Giver replied.

Lois Lowry  
*The Giver*

I have a genuine love as well as an ability to make curriculum connections. My teaching embraces differentiation of instruction and integration of curriculum. I view this as an equation that empowers students to achieve maximum growth as learners. Differentiation of instruction is guided by curriculum, flexible grouping, and ongoing assessment with fluid adjustment. Integration of curriculum is the blending of two or more areas of curriculum (example—math, social studies, and language arts) into a respectful, organized unit of study.

The aim is clear. All children should be able to advance to the best of their ability in accordance with general and special ability and aptitude. As the school year begins, I utilize a range of instructional and management strategies and welcome my new students. These learning strategies build relationships and create

an environment to raise student achievement. Examples include—multiple intelligences, a variety of texts and resources, literature circles, learning contracts, group investigations, independent study, interest centers, interest groups, and compacting. I also have a passion for history. Indiana is rich in history, regardless of whether we are reading, writing, or speaking about the land or the people.

Thanks to Patricia Cunningham's 4 Block model, I have learned to articulate more clearly the integration of language arts, social studies, science, health, and math. I choose to plan my instruction around student abilities, interests and the world we live in. A clear and current example would have me introduce you to Gene Stratton-Porter through the experiences of my fourth graders 2002-2003. In August 2002, my twenty-two fourth graders prepared for their first journey of discovery to the Gene Stratton-Porter Historic Site near Rome City, Indiana. Equipped with journals, pencils, sketching paper, the crayon bucket, the classroom digital camera, personal cameras and curiosity, these eleven boys and eleven girls embarked on a journey that carried us farther than we would have ever imagined. All students had been prepped in the use of our digital camera and had

been instructed to be on the lookout for picture ideas. Returning to Leesburg School, the students, of course, shared their notes. The next day was even more exciting as students brought their photographs to school, and I had downloaded student pictures to our iMac. Classroom dynamics and discussion were directing me to involve this group into a collaboration of minds. A foundation for understanding had been put into place. Gene Stratton-Porter was a clearly in the minds of these youngsters throughout the school year. They wrote plays, then planned and carried out their productions in front of live audiences, and they video taped their performances. As a class, we made our first movie (with music) during that first week. I will forever cherish Giovanni's words when viewing their movie he whispered to me, "Mrs. Kinsey, I can see those pictures in my mind and in my dreams at night." The children continued to make connections with this Indiana naturalist, author, and environmentalist as they learned about Indiana Indians in social studies, completed tree leaf identification projects for science, and wrote poetry or stories using their photographs and drawings, linking art and language arts throughout the curriculum. By March of 2003, two groups of students had completed in-depth research, writing, and technology projects on Gene Stratton-Porter and Indiana animals. Two other groups of youngsters were honing these same skills, but in other areas of Indiana studies—Indiana's Contributions to Aviation and Early Warsaw Hotels. These students

then had the good fortune to present these projects at our local EdCom venue that was attended by nearly a thousand K-12 students and adults from the community with special guests traveling from North Carolina, California, Ohio, South Korea, and Turkey. These experiences have truly reached beyond the walls of our classroom. The intention is to continue to use these storybook movies with appropriate audiences, professional development such as HASTI and Project Wild, tokens of appreciation (Gene Stratton-Porter Historic Site), and competition (International Student Media Fair). These students had become the teacher!

I believe that a really good teacher is someone who knows that a student can teach and a teacher can learn.

**Ann M. Kuper**  
**M.S.D. of Decatur Township**  
**Decatur Central High School**  
**Mathematics, ISTEP Preparation/Remediation, Grades 9-12**

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**"I believe that all students can be successful  
given their needed time and resources."**

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I believe that there is a direct relationship between highly effective teaching and highly effective coaching. Educational research supports this connection. Strong characteristics of my athletic and coaching careers have carried over into my classroom. Dedication, determination, willingness to sacrifice, development of professional expertise, high expectations, refusal to accept failure, ability to monitor and adjust, and a vision of continual improvement have been hallmarks of my teaching career.

My dedication and loyalty to my students, colleagues, and school are two factors that make me an outstanding teacher. In preparing my students for the year, it is imperative that my students know my expectations for their success. I believe that all students can be successful given their needed time and resources. Knowing that students have different learning styles, one would see multi-modality learning according to Gardiner's Multiple Intelligences in my classroom. TESA strands and Critical Elements of Instruction also would be highly visible. I teach every concept with my method of "best-practices." The majority of learning styles will be incorporated in that instructional scheme; however, if a student does not understand or comprehend the first time around, I always have a backup

plan or two. I am a true believer in two-dimensional and three-dimensional models for students to visualize a concept. I am constantly using my computer to develop visual representation of all possible concepts. If I can't draw it on the computer, I will construct a physical model designed for students to see and touch. If they begin to show signs of slipping, lack of confidence or understanding, they know that their classmates and/or I will be at their side with assistance and encouragement for them to start climbing their ladder of success again. They are very much aware that I am willing to put forth unlimited time and effort for each of them to be successful, but they too are expected to put forth the same amount of time and effort. My students are informed that learning is not an option, it is required.

I will never allow them to accept defeat; they must give their all. Within this realm of "coaching", my success has led to my facilitating the school wide ISTEP Preparation/Remediation Program. I have incorporated my "refuse to lose" philosophy in working with those students who have yet to pass the ISTEP. To ensure my students' success, I carefully plan my instruction, incorporate as much hands-on instruction as possible, and always include reteaching for mastery.

The greatest reward that I find in teaching comes from the students. It is the hugs, the thank-yous, the return visits, the excitement in their eyes, and the smiles on their faces that validate my teaching philosophy.

As previously stated, I do believe that all children can learn. I will do whatever it takes for each student to perform at his or her highest potential. Sometimes it is an inspirational talk, a parent contact, or just reteaching the material. They know that it is their choice. They must choose to climb to the top of their mountain. I will be there to assist them along the way. I will be the first to congratulate them on their success. My passion for each child's success is demonstrated by my overall persona. My students are treated with the utmost respect; therefore, permeating respect for each other and myself in and out of the classroom.

**Barbara McBride Lorch**  
**South Bend Community School Corporation**  
**Clay High School**  
**Business Education, Grades 9-12**

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"You can't teach them if you can't reach them."

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I have had many outstanding teachers in my life. Each of them had unique qualities I will never forget, but they all had common traits I will always remember. I have tried to model my teaching after these common traits. They had a passion for their subject matter and kept current; they created positive, non-threatening learning environments where students felt supported; they respected students and students respected them; they provided helpful, meaningful, and immediate feedback; they planned creative lessons; they were genuinely interested in what we had to say; they were concerned with educating students for life; they made us participate in our learning; they allowed us to learn by our mistakes and not be embarrassed by them; they all had senses of humor and made us smile and laugh; they were sensitive; they made us set high, reasonable standards for ourselves; they were prepared and organized; they listened; they encouraged discussion; they were fair and consistent; they made it all make sense; they provided us with new opportunities; they taught us not to quit; they cared; they were flexible and able to adapt to the unique needs of each student; they made students want to come to class; and they were hard to say goodbye to at graduation and the first to be mentioned at the class reunions.

Some days I feel as though my philosophy of teaching is *Never Give Up and Never Sit Down*. I teach three two-hour multimedia labs. In my labs, each student is doing something different. One student may be animating a web page, another may be editing an audio project, and two more might be producing a video for the school announcements. I think of myself as a facilitator in this exhilarating, controlled chaos. Because there is only one teacher and about thirty students, my students know that they are expected to share their knowledge with others in the classroom. This is the best way for them to reinforce and apply their learning. I will often see a special education student instructing an honors student on how to use a feature on a camera or add transitions to a video. I feel *all* my students are gifted and talented. Some are gifted in the way they make me laugh; some are talented in the way they use every ounce of their limited abilities to come up with creative ideas for projects. I believe a teacher must use students' talents to their fullest and must create an environment where students want to learn, feel safe, and feel that they belong. The hundreds of sample projects displayed in and around my classroom reveal the diverse talents of my students. I believe it essential to find the "light switch" in every student so I can "turn on

the light bulb” and give each child a reason to love to come to class. With some students you have to hunt in the darkness a bit longer to find the light switch, but you must never stop until you find it. You can’t teach them if you can’t reach them. I continually alter my curriculum based upon how the employment market changes. Keeping a business technology lab current, relevant, and up-to-date in this age of rapidly changing technology takes countless hours. I job shadow as often as possible to determine the needs of the employing community and detail their activities. I do not have a textbook for my lab since I feel it important to open up the real world and have students replicate actual work experiences. I have authored over 40 simulations to help my students get the most from their time with me.

A teacher must be there and always care. Being there does not only mean being physically present in a classroom. The times I have encountered students outside the classroom have often made more of an impact in their lives than my presence in the classroom. I have visited students in hospitals and the Juvenile Justice Center; I have attended and sponsored extracurricular activities; and I have met students and parents at colleges to help them through the admissions process. For several years on the last day of school, I have given my seniors a toy paratrooper. The parachute lets them know that I will be there if they need to be caught. The fact that it’s a toy reminds them to enjoy life. When I

encounter these students years later, they often will tell me they still have the paratrooper and can recall what it symbolized.

The rewards of teaching are intangible gifts that mean everything and arrive at unexpected times. One gift I will never forget was given the night students showed up to help me teach the first evening of an adult class on the day my brother was killed in an accident. I was proud of the way they taught the adults and helped me. Another rewarding moment came when one of my special education student’s video projects took first place in a technology competition. His project was better than all other projects—even projects entered by honor students. I went to his graduation party and his mother had tears in her eyes when talking about what this award meant to the family. Recently a student who graduated a year ago told me he decided to go back to college because of something I said to him when I ran into him while he was serving food at a banquet. The thank you letters from students and parents, the e-mails, and the notes on the back of school photos are all rewards of teaching; but nothing compares to the reward of knowing you have made a difference in a life.

"I let them know that we can do this by using everyone's strengths."

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As I contemplated my philosophy on teaching, a couple of beliefs came quickly to mind. They have become two components that I strongly believe in and incorporate within my classroom. The first one being: *"Every child can learn"* and the other: *"You are never too old to learn."*

I am a strong believer that every child can learn. I keep a quote from George Evans on the inside of my closet that reads, *"Every student can learn, just not on the same day, or the same way."* I feel that it is my job to find a way for each child to succeed. A good teacher cannot reach all of his/her students with a *"one size fits all"* approach. Differentiated Instruction is a method that has assisted me in my efforts to have all of my students be more successful. Studies in Learning Styles, Multiple Intelligences, and Best Practices have all suggested that teachers need to differentiate their instruction. Reading various books and attending numerous seminars on Differentiated Instruction have given me additional ways to vary assignments, more hands-on activities, and a variety of assessment tools.

At the beginning of the school year, I go even further with the "every child can learn" idea with my students. I tell them that we, as a class, need to work together.

I let them know that we can do this by using everyone's strengths. As a class, we discuss how some people might be better at reading, while others might be stronger in math, art, or singing. We also discuss how some students prefer getting in front of the class to do a presentation, while others prefer a test. Most importantly, we discuss that we need to applaud others for their strengths and accept theirs, as well as our own areas for growth.

Another quote comes to mind concerning my other belief. Henry Ford has been quoted to say, *"Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young."* Every teacher needs to adhere to this quote. After all, I cannot imagine many teachers would go to a doctor that refused to keep up with new issues and procedures. So, we should expect no less from ourselves. I try to abide by this by attending seminars and conferences. They give me the opportunity to learn, not only from the speaker, but from fellow teachers as well. Seminars sometimes provide me with new ideas and techniques, or sometimes they provide me with that *spark* that I need to rekindle my excitement for teaching and learning.



In addition to seminars, teaching allows me time during the summer to work on improving my curriculum. During the summer I search for new assessment tools. I often use time to work on new curriculum for the recently adopted text. Developing and/or creating new learning activities or centers are how a large part of my summers are spent.

I would like to believe that both of my philosophies contribute to an enhanced classroom. I try to be that old dog that can learn new tricks. By accomplishing this, I hope that I am finding ways for every student to learn; either in their way or on their time.

**"Children need to see the value of what they learn."**

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Each year I have the opportunity to influence 25 to 30 students to grow academically, to become knowledgeable and skilled individuals and responsible citizens. I use the word *influence* because I cannot fully control their learning. There are many forces at work in a child's education such as parent and community support and the child's own effort. My task as an educator is to help each child reach his or her potential and to become a life-long learner.

I firmly believe that all students have strengths and can learn. They learn at different rates and in different ways, but they can find success. When they find success, the effort that they give to learning greatly improves. No person, young or old, wishes to fail. People also do not enjoy tasks where they do not experience success. It is my responsibility as an educator to plan lessons that are engaging and that make use of multiple talents that children bring to the classroom in order to help them succeed.

Children need to see the value of what they learn. Although direct instruction is necessary, I believe teacher directed mini-lessons are the most valuable, and then the student needs to be actively involved. Examples of this could be writing stories, reading "real" children's literature,

making projects to emphasize key points in social studies, or performing experiments in science. The more that the child is an active participant, the more he or she will take away from the lesson.

I believe in setting challenging, but attainable, goals for my students. There are many distractions outside of school that often make it difficult for students to willingly give their time and focus, but, with parent and community help, I believe all of my students can achieve and be successful. For example, I ask my students to set high goals in self-selected reading because I know that to become a better reader a person has to read! My expectations may be higher than what students are accustomed to, but I want them to discover their potential. I need to help them reach this goal through my enthusiasm for reading and by providing them with enticing books and strategies to understand and enjoy.

When I reflect upon my teaching career thus far, I hope that I have given as much to my students as they have given to me. Their successes are my most memorable rewards. For example, I have introduced two visiting authors to the creative writing of a very gifted fifth grade student that I had the pleasure of teaching. Both authors wrote to my student encouraging

her to continue with her aspiration. I recall another student who entered my room unable to speak any English. After one year in my classroom I could see her desire to learn and that she was very intelligent, but I suggested she be retained. She had made progress in English, but had fewer gains with the fifth grade curriculum. Finding her name on the middle school honor roll the following year may have been as much of a reward to me as it was to her. I have experienced multiple rewards from the fifth grade History Fair. Over the years students have made new connections with their families, especially their grandparents. One child's entire Japanese-American family discovered the grandparents had been interned during World War II, something they had not previously shared. Another grandfather wrote his grandson after his project on World War II in the Pacific to relate events that he had not even shared with his wife, but after seeing his grandson's interest felt it was time to share his experiences. Many students' parents included visiting historical sites during family vacations after seeing the interest of their children in their history fair topics.

While these examples are especially memorable to me, students reward me daily when they give me their best effort, when they find success in work well done, and when they return to visit and describe how their fifth grade experiences helped them find success as they continued on in school. I don't believe there could be a greater reward than making a difference in a child's life.

**"I believe that all children have an innate desire to learn,  
but the desire has to constantly be nurtured."**

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I believe that all children have an innate desire to learn, but the desire has to constantly be nurtured. To do this the teacher must always be enthusiastic, patient, understanding, and knowledgeable. Instilling the values of honesty and integrity are equally important. Teaching therefore requires passion fueled by an intellectual curiosity, and a constant search for ways of inspiring children to feel the same.

My abilities as a teacher and the rewards of teaching are interrelated. My program develops values that I feel are important and should be instilled in children today. The rewards for me occur when I see that students are absorbing those values.

We participate in programs such as: Read Across America, No TV Week, and Newspapers in Education. I created an activity called S.A.F.E-Stories Are For Everyone. We do oral book reports where children develop confidence speaking to the group about a favorite book. Weaker readers gain confidence by reading to the kindergarten students. All these activities nurture an appetite for reading.

Our school participates in the Martin Luther King Jr. Kindness and Justice program. I connect it to the unit in our

reading anthology entitled "Kindness." Children become aware that acts of kindness are their own reward.

During Black History Month we gain a greater understanding of another important culture, through books, videos, and discussions.

On Friends and Family Day, it is touching to see love, respect, and joy in the interactions across the generations as grandparents, aunts, uncles, or other adult friends visit.

The culmination of my writing program this past year was a research project about "Our Country." The end product was a display which drew many positive comments.

Integration is particularly effective in our dual curriculum program because it allows more material to be covered as students form connections across the subject matter. Language Arts is integrated with math, science, art, computers, economics, and gym. Music plays a large part in my class. We gather round the piano to sing as we develop phonemic awareness. Those learners with musical intelligence stand right by my side. Demonstrations of my beliefs about

teaching may be found in my classroom at all times. Evidence of students' work is displayed all around the room and in the halls. I keep records of whose work is up, so that every child has a turn to be encouraged and rewarded. Children are engaged in activities from singing to writing, to group discussions, to doing "phonics gymnastics", to chanting vocabulary to the beat of a metronome, and to walk along chalk-drawn letters on the carpet when we learn cursive.

My classroom provides a rich environment for all types of learners and accommodates various intelligences, learning styles, and use of the five senses.

It is important to keep knowledge about education current, and I demonstrate this belief by applying what I read, to my class. I am always interested in the way children think and learn, and I use questioning techniques that encourage higher levels of thinking. With stimulation children do reach levels of *analysis* or *evaluation* even in second grade.

**"Students are empowered when they are able to discover their own answers, thus transferring ownership of their learning."**

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Teaching is not a traditional nine to five job where a person can come in, work, and go home. My students come into my classroom with different needs and backgrounds. I work diligently to create connections with the children and get to know their strengths and weaknesses. Once I understand their individual learning styles I can start planning strategies to teach them and open up their understanding.

One strong belief that I think is the key to student learning is that students construct their own knowledge based on their prior experiences. They come to us from a variety of backgrounds that we can build from. To foster learning teachers must offer hands-on discovery. Students are empowered when they are able to discover their own answers, thus transferring ownership of their learning.

To support this constructionist approach to learning teachers need to set up their classroom appropriately. In this type of environment students are taking responsibility for their learning and making the rules rather than following them. I have supported this belief by creating a classroom environment of self discovery, observation, and inquiry. I am piloting a standards based, inquiry based,

math program that helps students move beyond basic arithmetic and nurtures higher order and critical thinking skills using everyday, real world problems and situations.

In order to meet the needs of all my students I strongly believe in the importance of assessments. I use assessments to guide my instruction and to gain a better understanding of the needs of my students. Through a variety of different assessments at the beginning of the year, I am able to gain an understanding of where each individual student is at and use that information to guide my teaching. So often assessments are given only as a means to obtain a score and are not utilized to improve teaching strategies or instruction.

By administering the same assessment two more times throughout the year I am able to see each students' individual growth. For me, this is one of the most rewarding parts of being in teaching. It is an amazing feeling to see the growth throughout the school year and know that the work you have done has helped foster it. There is nothing more satisfying than doing report cards at the end of the year and looking back at where students began and watching how far they have come.

One last philosophy I share about teaching is the necessity of self evaluation. To improve our instruction we must look at the effectiveness of it first. Self reflection is a necessary component to teaching and has helped me look objectively at my teaching and my strategies and their effectiveness on student learning. I became involved in Cognitive Coaching offered through our district as a way to support this belief. Through Cognitive Coaching I have increased awareness of my intentions, thinking, and behavior and the resulting consequences of my instructional approach. By working with a peer I am able to focus on areas that I consider needing the most attention and work with them to find strategies that will improve my teaching in those areas.

**Barbara Sue Petroff**  
**Concordia Lutheran High School**  
**Spanish, Levels II and IV, Grades 9-12**

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**"I must be prepared each day, and I must expect that  
each of my students is also prepared."**

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"...to minister to each student as a chosen and redeemed child of God." This phrase from one of our mission statements expresses my philosophy of teaching. As I pondered this topic, "my philosophy", the phrase whirled in my head; it wouldn't leave. Although our school no longer uses the statement that contains this phrase, I have never forgotten it.

Each year as more than one hundred students enter my classroom, I must remember that each is an individual and each is a child of God. My responsibility is to teach each child in the very best manner that I can. I must be prepared each day, and I must expect that each of my students is also prepared. Teachers and students are bombarded with distractions: world crises, family situations, sports, band competitions, jobs, church activities, and the inevitable teenage "love" crisis. Sometimes I marvel that we accomplish anything at all. But after nearly 30 years of teaching I know that we accomplish marvelous things. I must set the example for my students. I must be prepared; I must return tests and papers very quickly; I must model the behavior and language that I expect of each of them every day in my classroom. I want them to learn to respect each other and other cultures. As I teach them

Spanish, I have the perfect opportunity to not only teach the language, but also to teach them the history and culture of a variety of peoples who happen to speak another language.

I also want to teach them to be caring individuals. Many have said about me, "She cares about her students." I do care, and I take the time to get to know them and what they are interested in. But more importantly I want them to care about each other. I want my students to know that each person in the class has special talents. From the D+ student who sewed a beautiful flag of Argentina for our "Flag Project" to the very studious girl who practiced her speech for state competition in front of our class to the swimmer who went to state, each one is valuable. I want my students to learn to appreciate the talents that they have been given by God and to care about each other.

If these practices make me an outstanding teacher, so be it. However, I believe that every good teacher must realize that while some may see her as "outstanding", there will also be those that she does not reach, who don't see her as "outstanding." This thought makes me try harder, leads me to try new projects, and motivates me to continue to learn. Even after all of these



years of teaching, I continually find joy and excitement in the learning that takes place in my Spanish classroom.

My rewards are many. The letters I receive from former students, the comments I hear from parents, the yearly return of a “problem student” who stops by to let me know how he is doing now all reinforce the fact that I have done something right. The greatest reward has been watching former students follow in my footsteps. They too are becoming outstanding teachers. What better tribute can there be?

**Henry Poteet**  
**New Albany-Floyd County Consolidated School Corporation**  
**Georgetown Elementary School**  
**Math, Spelling, and Reading, Grade 6**

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**"If students experience continuous success, the children will develop the mindset that they can learn, that they can be successful."**

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From a very early age I was destined to be a teacher. There is no doubt that teaching is more of a calling for me than merely choosing a profession. I am proud to say that I am a teacher. There is no profession that has the potential to touch future generations as does teaching. The American historian Henry Brooks Adams stated it clearly, "A teacher affects eternity. He can never tell where his influence stops." What an awesome opportunity and responsibility we have as teachers. My one desire that drives all aspects of my philosophy is to make a lasting difference in the lives of my students.

I believe that all children can learn and want to be successful. All students are individuals. They come from a variety of backgrounds and have interests, abilities, and needs that are unique to them. It is my responsibility to establish a classroom where all students are afforded the opportunity to learn, experience success, feel safe, and be accepted by everyone. I must continuously assess the strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles of each student in order to develop appropriate lessons and activities that will lead to successful learning.

In my classroom, my students know they are important and are valued by me. They

know I want them to succeed. Guiding children to this realization is very critical to their success. If children experience constant failure, they soon believe they are failures. If students experience continuous success, the children will develop the mindset that they can learn, that they can be successful. It is important that I create experiences in my classroom to improve students' self-esteem. Praise, encouragement, positive reinforcement, and creative learning experiences go a long way in moving obstacles to success. When a child believes in himself it is amazing what he can achieve.

It is important that my students know my high expectations for them both academically and behaviorally. I believe that students will perform at the level that is expected of them. It is important to help children establish good work ethics. I challenge my students to be the very best they can be in all they do. I guide my students to realize their abilities and encourage them to work to their fullest potential.

I want to instill in my students a genuine love for learning and a desire to grow into responsible contributing members of their community. I want to equip my students with the ability to make wise decisions. I give my students choices concerning their

learning in my classroom. I have always used the expression “Freedom Within A Framework.” I set the parameters and let my students make decisions within those guidelines. Along with making decisions or choices comes responsibility. It is important that students be held accountable for their decisions and actions and realize the consequences, both positive and negative, for their choices.

I can best help my students by being a good role model—practicing what I preach. My students must observe me respecting all people. I have a small poster that says “To Get Respect, Give Respect” I live by this motto. I treat each of my students with genuine respect and in return expect the same from them. I try to develop in my students the importance of self-respect, respecting others, their school, their classroom, and the belongings of others. They must see my love for learning, my work ethics, and my decision-making skills in action. Hopefully, my students will recognize that what I’m asking of them is part of my own value system.

A key component to student success is parent involvement. It is essential that parents, teachers, and students work together. I think of education as a triangle. Each side of the triangle: parents, students, and teachers is a vital component for success. When parents, students, and teachers are all working together, there is no limit to what can be accomplished.

I can think of no profession more rewarding than teaching. The true rewards in teaching are intangible and innumerable. They can be as subtle as the comments you hear during a lesson, “Wow!”, “That is cool!”, or “This is fun!” A reward might be the excited, happy look on a student’s face when he finally has learned a new skill. It can be the smile you get when you hand a child back an “A” test paper, realizing how hard that student had worked for that “A.” Another reward might be the note written by a student on the bottom of the spelling test or a picture drawn and placed on your desk at the end of a day. Rewards often come years after a student leaves the classroom. I cherish the letters and notes I receive from former students telling me that I made a difference in their lives. When this happens, I know I have done my job well. To be told you have made a difference is the highest compliment a teacher can receive.

American teacher and astronaut Christa McAuliffe said, “I touch the future—I teach.” I am truly blessed to have had the opportunity for thirty-three years to affect the future each day with my students. What a privilege to be called a teacher!

**"We give the unmotivated child a reason to want to learn  
instead of more excuses not to."**

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Outstanding teaching is more than presenting information you know well. **You must take the information and teach it to children you know well.** A teacher's depth of understanding of their students is what determines success. Outstanding teachers take responsibility for whether or not a student learns. We give the unmotivated child a reason to want to learn instead of more excuses not to. We connect with every child—from the first to raise their hand to the student who never does—and involve them in the classroom.

Locating an outstanding teacher is often difficult. These creatures often bypass the lunch room to work with Johnny on his math facts during recess. Seldom are they found at their desk—instead one must scour the room to find them crouched down, eye-level with students engaged in learning. These teachers are most easily found by following the trail of successful students that had once floundered.

The measure of an outstanding teacher is not by the plaques, trophies and degrees they've earned. Rather, it is the degree of learning each student carries with them out of the classroom. Children must walk out with a sense of accomplishment, believing they can do whatever the teacher may ask. Outstanding teachers do

not have walls covered with awards and a wallet full of membership cards. They are in the trenches, fighting for the love of learning, often overlooked because they are not the person "out front." They are seldom boisterous, teaching not for glory but for children. Excellent teachers know it is easy to teach the "fun stuff" but challenging to teach the standards that are much more abstract.

**I insist children learn in my room.** I refuse to let them sit quietly and slip through the cracks. If a child isn't successful, I haven't done my job. If a child doesn't understand, I present the information repeatedly, varying the method of presentation until we find one that clicks. If a child is not motivated to learn, I must find the catalyst to spark learning in that child.

Teaching mathematics to five different classes, students could easily slip through the cracks and hide their lack of understanding. To ensure this doesn't occur, I maintain class lists for each math standard. Children are observed, tested, and evaluated through several activities to ensure mastery. Students who consistently perform well are highlighted on the standard sheet. Interventions such as reteaching, conferencing, alternative activities and testing are initiated for

students who have demonstrated gaps or inconsistencies. When these students obtain mastery, their names are marked with a second color to show how easily the standard was obtained. By the end of September, students tend to be up front when they do not understand and are not afraid to seek help. They know I will soon find out how well they understand and often initiate the interventions before I need to! Most students have weak and strong areas in math. I make an extra effort to point out their strengths which inevitably gives them confidence to confront the more difficult areas of mathematics!

My class integrates repetition of key standards into a mix of the fun (and not so fun). Most students enter 5th grade with a solid understanding of geometry because teachers find these standards entertaining for kids and easy to teach. They typically struggle with the less entertaining, more abstract standards such as measurement, problem solving and number sense. I insist they master all standards equally and combine problem solving into every math lesson and standard. My job is not to make math “fun”; it is to connect math with each student so they are prepared for ISTEP and the biggest test—LIFE.

Outstanding teachers are rewarded without trophies, pictures and newspaper clippings. We are rewarded daily with meaningful discussions, the sense of teaching a lesson well and watching children challenge themselves or

exclaiming, “Now I get it!” in class. Handmade pictures and cards cover our desks and walls because their creators know we appreciate the meaning behind the paper. Mothers of students brighten our day with success stories in the produce section of the grocery store. Students’ smiles when they compare the August pre-test with the May post-test shine brightly in our memories. For years, we feel overlooked, sometimes stressed from a day of intense teaching while we help students battle their troubles outside of school as well. We find ourselves wondering why we cannot physically allow ourselves to take the “easy way out” when it comes to teaching, grading and assessing students. Years pass quickly until one day a young child with a short attention span writes a four-page letter to nominate their homeroom teacher for Teacher of the Year. Given the student’s effort, an outstanding teacher could not help but accept the humbling nomination (even when they are not comfortable bragging about their work).

The ultimate reward for this teacher was not being chosen, but seeing the child’s face light up when they heard the good news. Realizing the little things we do each day really do make a difference, being named Teacher of the Year was just icing on a ten layer cake!

**Susan Rodriguez**  
**Logansport Community School Corporation**  
**Fairview Elementary School**  
**Kindergarten**

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**"I want my students to become excited about  
learning beginning with Kindergarten."**

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Being a teacher has been a way of life for me. Being a positive influence and extended role model to youth, as well as to my colleagues is very important to me. Children need good, honest, hard-working, kind, dedicated adults to look up to as they grow up in today's society. I am one of those people. Students in my classroom are taught that there are different levels of success, but that everyone will succeed. I feel that my students mature a little quicker in a Full Day Kindergarten setting due to the added responsibilities that are gradually added. Fairview has been a C.L.A.S.S. school for the past eight years. Using the Lifelong Guidelines as well as the Lifeskills enables me to successfully manage and instruct my Kindergartners with minimum discipline challenges. I not only encourage, but expect my students to be active listeners, to tell only the truth, to do their personal best at all times, to never use put downs, and to earn trust from others. I want my students to become excited about learning beginning with Kindergarten. They are like little sponges at that age; soaking up everything I tell them. It's a magical time for all of us. I fill my classroom with love and motivation for learning by using kind and positive words, along with a variety of teaching techniques. If you have ever been in a Kindergarten room for very

long, you know that it is a very exciting and active place. I have designed and filled my room with developmentally appropriate activities that the students actively engage in throughout the day. I am on my toes running the show from the moment they walk in until I say, "Good-bye, see you tomorrow," at the end of the day, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

I also enjoy using the "FISH Philosophy" developed by Pike Place Fish Market in Seattle, Washington. The four components of this unique, yet simple, philosophy are: **Choose Your Attitude**—I am an upbeat positive person who is responsible for setting the tone for the day; **Be There**—I closely observe my students for individual needs and attention, and I listen to what they are saying; **Play**—I have a great sense of humor and I know that happy children are learning children; and **Make Their Day**—I want every child to go home and tell their parents something great about their Kindergarten day.

If rewards for teaching were a penny apiece, I'd be a millionaire. Hearing my name being called from the top of a fire engine, by a local queen candidate—former 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student, as it slowly went by during a recent parade, receiving at least 40 hugs a day, being called "Mom"

or “Grandma”, hanging up carefully colored pictures, cherishing little notes given to me once the children know enough letter sounds to begin writing, reading letters from former students, receiving graduation invitations, carefully saving notes from parents thanking me, watching a student learn to write his/her name, listening to students as they begin to sound out words, seeing that once-in-a-lifetime smile as a student “Gets It” are all rewards that mean the world to me.

My style of teaching most truly reflects my beliefs that children are what we make them. When I tell children how smart they are, they hear it, and feel it, and believe in themselves that they can do well. They want to be loved, comforted, and taught. Success as a human being, as well as a teacher is beautifully stated by Ralph Waldo Emerson:

To laugh often and much;  
to win the respect of intelligent people  
and the affection of children;  
to earn the appreciation of honest critics  
and endure the betrayal of false friends;  
to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others;  
to leave the world a bit better,  
whether by a healthy child,  
a garden patch  
or a redeemed social condition;  
to know even one life has breathed easier  
because you have lived.  
This is to have succeeded.

When all is said and done, I will confidently be able to tell others that I know where my place in this world was and how I used my life to make it better for others. That’s what teachers do.

**"My main instructional goal is to individualize as much as possible."**

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I have devoted thirty-two years of my life to the teaching profession. I love my job. It has its share of challenges, but also has its rewards. Using two of Og Mandino's quotes in *The Greatest Success in the World* essentially sums up my philosophy of teaching. He writes, "Thou must labor each day as if thy life hung in the balance. Always perform all that is asked of you and more. Always do your best." Mr. Mandino also states, "Thou must realize that plans are only dreams without action. Who can measure your talents by the thoughts you have or the emotions you feel? Only action gives to life its strength, its joy, its purpose. Laugh at your doubts!"

Regarding the first quote, I do all I can to educate my students. I make home visits to gain a better understanding of how to reach certain students who are experiencing learning difficulties. Many after school hours are spent planning lessons that will help students master skills included in the state standards. I keep in close communication with parents to keep them informed and to get a handle on problems certain children might be facing after the school day is over. I feel strongly about inviting parents and other members of the community to special events such as the Indiana History night,

the Orleans Elementary Math Fair, and to class plays. I make telephone calls and home visits to praise deserving students for jobs well done. My main instructional goal is to individualize as much as possible.

Regarding the second quotation, I believe that it is important to constantly look for ways of improving one's teaching methods. Attending in-service workshops, surfing the internet, and communicating with other teachers are useful ways of gaining new ideas. I feel that I have "laughed at my doubts" by not being afraid to try new methods such as instructional games, simulated activities, and a monologue presentation.

Yes the challenges of teaching are very real. The rewards I find in teaching are equally real! The smile of a student who has just grasped a difficult concept is worth it all. It is so gratifying to receive a thank you card from a parent expressing his or her appreciation for my efforts. Words of praise from my principal and superintendent have been sources of encouragement for me. I value the praise of a student, or former student very highly. Finally, it is so rewarding to know that I am doing my very best to make a positive difference in young lives.





**Teri Sanders**  
**Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation**  
**F. J. Reitz High School**  
**Biology/Advanced Biology, Grades 9-12**

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**"Teaching is not focusing on fact but connecting with the minds of your students in a way that changes their lives forever."**

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How great it is to share our excitement and see the eyes of our students and colleagues light-up as their minds too are turned on! "Oh, now I understand! I have never seen or heard of that before! That is why we do that!" There is no feeling like it. The feelings you get are one of the greatest rewards in the world. There is not another career in which an individual is given the opportunity to continuously learn new things about a subject they love and the opportunity to share these ideas and concepts with young minds.

Science is changing at an exponential rate. Teachers can only skim the surface of the knowledge pool. Teaching is not focusing on fact but connecting with the minds of your students in a way that changes their lives forever. It requires a devotion to the art of teaching, students, your subject, and continuously learning and improving. For me, it is a passion.

A teacher is one who is prepared, walks into class each day with their lessons and room ready and has a positive, enthusiastic attitude. They have high expectations for the students, themselves, and their colleagues, and understand where the students are coming from and can relate to them on their own level. The students are responsible for their own learning and they know this from the

very beginning. The lessons are well thought out and innovative. They meet educational standards that don't revolve around a textbook (it is used as a reference). More often than not the lessons contain some form of technology. The process involves constant evaluation and is assessed on acquisition of concepts and application of skills through traditional and performance assessment. Technology plays the role of catalyst, it is not the lesson's focus, and takes the learner's understanding into unforeseen depths.

I am an outstanding teacher because I use my teaching strengths and passions to inspire my students to be curious, to discover, to apply and to learn. They get frustrated when I won't give them the answer, but after a time they figure out I won't and they don't ask. By the conclusion of the lesson, they take ownership for what they have discovered and learned because they did it. I provide a learning environment that is educational, fun, and motivating through the use of computer stations and a class website which houses a multitude of resources, assignments, examples of student's work, and copies of important documents they can download from any computer hooked to the internet. I am continuously searching for new and

exciting ways to teach science, improve my classroom, and incorporate cross-curricular material. I integrate history when I share my private collection of old science texts from around the 1850s to early 1900s. We compare science as it was then and science as it is now. I provide innovative applicable lessons through animated computer presentations and lots and lots of hands-on discovery. A new lesson I have added is making different sized cells using origami, then measuring the surface area and calculating the volume. The students will plot the information using Microsoft Excel and compare the increases in both.

But teaching isn't just whether the students acquired knowledge; it is how they feel when they are with you. Students are treated with respect and compassion as individuals and in a consistent manner. We laugh and sometimes cry together. They come in for extra help and to take care of the plants and animals in the room. They take ownership of their classroom environment. At the start of class, students don a white lab coat and their name tags to begin acting the part of a scientist.

Sharing the intricacies of a cell by studying Hooke's *Micrographia*, opening student's eyes to the beauty of a nephron by dissecting a deer kidney, figuring out through forensics and DNA technology whether Anna Anderson was really Anastasia Romanov, to peaking student curiosity about what makes something

alive through science "magic" and a little DUCO cement is part of my teaching. It is all fascinating and exciting. To recognize when a student's mind makes the connections, to hear their discussions as they work their way through a lab, to see them help one another, and to hear "Now I get it!", "Wow, look at this!", or "We did it!" gives you a natural high. It is wonderful reward when former students come back to visit as successful individuals.

"Students learn from example;  
not only from me, but also from the older students."

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All children need structure, discipline and love. They also need and deserve to be challenged. I have learned those things from my special students. The exuberant smiles show me how proud they are that they have taught *me* something, especially when it relates to computers!

Our classroom has never been "my classroom." My students spend much of their instructional time with me. They need a place to feel comfortable and to call home. The relationship/friendship that I work hard at achieving early on each fall is imperative for the success of our program.

I learned early in my teaching experience that both consistency and flexibility are important. Even a fire drill can cause extreme disruption! Keeping the daily routine as "normal" as possible allows the students to know what is expected, regardless of the situation.

I believe that developing a positive relationship with parents early is also very important in creating a successful school year. Setting expectations, as well as understanding the students' and parents' concerns, are conducive in developing confident and independent students.

One positive classroom management technique I have learned is never reprimand or punish students in front of their peers. I found it causes resentment or hostility towards the other students or towards me. Often, I only have to "nod" toward the door and, without a big scene, the problem is usually corrected.

Humor and respect are characteristics that one can observe daily in our classroom. From the first day in the school year, the acceptable behaviors are established. If the incoming freshmen aren't sure what is "acceptable", the upper classmen are wonderful about mentoring the "new" kids. Students learn from example; not only from me, but also from the older students.

As a teacher, I feel privileged and rewarded in knowing I have shared many lifelong skills with my students. My students continue to stay in touch long after graduation. I know I have helped them become confident, independent and responsible adults. Over the years I have often been complimented by other staff members on how far certain students have progressed to the point where all teachers would like to have my students in their classrooms. When I get that sort of feedback, I feel that I have been successful in my job.



**Christina Marie Smeltzley**  
**East Allen County Schools**  
**Leo Junior/Senior High School**  
**Mathematics, Grades 9-12**

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**"I believe it is my responsibility to challenge my students yet stand beside them as they reach and stretch to succeed."**

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I believe strongly that education is a lifelong process with an ultimate goal of creating a total individual. As an educator, I feel it is my responsibility not only to teach mathematics but also to make the material and the learning process positive, stimulating and relative to the students' lives. I believe students should leave my classroom not only having gained mathematical insight but also having gained the confidence, desire, and ability to think and learn.

Integral to my philosophy of education is the notion that each student is a unique individual and must be treated with respect. The relationships I form with each and every student who enters my classroom are not only a critical part of my philosophy but also of my personality and ultimately my success as a teacher. No student deserves to learn in fear of asking a question, in fear of being ridiculed or in fear of not being heard. A successful classroom is grounded in trust and mutual respect. The respect I give to students, no matter what their ability, allows me to reach all students on a personal level. I believe anyone can be successful in my mathematics classes because of the environment we, as a class, create. A safe classroom for students requires patience, compassion, empathy and understanding not only from me but

also from each and every participant in my classroom. I believe it is my responsibility to challenge my students yet stand beside them as they reach and stretch to succeed. Students must set goals knowing that no goal is too high if we climb together with care and confidence. To vary my teaching style is not enough to help all students achieve their goals. To be successful, I must be at the level of my students, no matter where they may be. I strive to reach all students at all levels to make their learning experience as productive and worthwhile as possible. Education then involves much more than presentation of material. It involves reaching real people, allowing them to experience success and failure, and standing by their side to encourage them throughout the process. It involves creating critical thinkers who appreciate and respect not only the material and the teacher, but who also become attributes to society because they respect each other and the learning process. I believe my ultimate purpose is to produce individuals who strive for excellence for themselves, their peers and their community.

Education is part of my mind and part of my heart. I chose to be a teacher because I wanted to make a difference in kids' lives not only academically but also emotionally. I must reach students in my

classroom, as well as on a personal and supportive level outside of my classroom. I believe I am accomplishing these goals and living my philosophy both as a teacher and a role model for kids. I am proud of the successes each of my students experience and strive to challenge myself to be not only a facilitator of classroom learning but also an enthusiastic and caring educator who knows the gift of giving and embraces the challenge of being a part of the formation of a total individual. No one teacher can possibly teach everyone all the knowledge they will need to be successful in the world; however, I take pride in knowing students from my classroom have gained not only knowledge but also the motivation to fill the gaps that exist and to continue learning for the rest of their lives.

**Annette Stoffel**  
**Huntington County Community School Corporation**  
**Central Elementary**  
**Mult-year, Grades 2 and 3**

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**"I believe outstanding teachers are 'Agents of Change'."**

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Education is an exciting and ever changing profession. We cannot say that our business of educating children is the same as it was 20 years ago. In many respects education has changed drastically within the last 5 years. Teachers are constantly evaluating, assessing, and researching best practice in the classroom. Those who have embraced change and are committed to continuous learning, by becoming learners themselves, have successful classrooms and successful students. PL 221 is a very powerful process for my school and for me personally. This process has asked each teacher to research strategies, evaluate current practice, and develop programs that meet the needs of each learner.

I believe outstanding teachers are "Agents of Change." They always question what is best for students, regularly collaborate with peers to identify effective practice, and intentionally make personal connections with students that support each student and family.

I am an "Agent of Change."

- I participate in the evaluation of student programs. I question what is

best for students and work to create an integrated curriculum that has real-life applications and encourages student diversity. I am involved in continuous learning that is embedded into my classroom practice.

- I write grants to support new classroom initiatives and student programs within my classroom, school, and corporation.
- I spend time collaborating with and supporting other teachers in my own building and in other schools within my corporation. As a corporation writing coach, I offer suggestions and brainstorm effective classroom practice for teaching writing strategies. I am involved in the teacher mentor program at IWU and work with teachers in the masters program.
- I have created and maintain a classroom environment that promotes diversity in learning and asks each student to share his or her unique talents.
- I encourage families to become involved in their student's schooling experience. I support this involvement by providing opportunities for



students and their families to work together at the school by hosting reading and math nights.

Outstanding teachers are involved in all aspects of the students learning experience. They are committed to education through the pursuit of new knowledge. They network with other teachers using current best practice. They involve each student's family in the education setting. Outstanding teachers who commit themselves to the profession of education have truly successful classrooms.

**"The issue for me is not so much whether every child can learn  
as it is that every child learns differently."**

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If a man does not keep pace with his companions,  
perhaps it is because he hears a different  
drummer. Let him step to the music which he  
hears, however measured or far away.

- Henry David Thoreau

My teaching philosophy is based soundly on these famous words from Henry David Thoreau, one of the earliest founders of the ecological movement who seemed to understand over a hundred years ago that each child marches to the beat of a different drummer. The issue for me is not so much whether every child can learn as it is that every child learns differently. As an educator or a guide for children, I believe it is my role to discover the "drummer" in each child thereby finding the key to unlocking his mind to effective learning as an exciting adventure that is to be enjoyed.

Each year our key ring has a different set of keys on it. These keys only work if we design lessons that meet the needs of every child and not just a few. Consequently, this means we cannot confine ourselves to the limitations of just mortar and text books especially to generations of children who have grown up in a highly visual and media world. We also know that children learn best when they are actively involved with the learning. Research tells us that children

recall 70% of what they have been told 3 hours later but only 10% 3 days later. If we can blend telling and showing those statistics jump to 85% recall in 3 hours and 65% 3 days later. As we struggle daily with higher levels of accountability and meeting curricular standards, I believe the key is more innovative actively involved brain compatible lessons that meet the needs of every single child in the classroom.

Developing and utilizing an Outdoor Lab for Lowell Elementary School, is one of the ways I work daily to put my personal teaching philosophy into action. The Outdoor Lab allows me to reach every type of multiple intelligence learner defined by Gardner, Armstrong, Butler and others. A few examples of brain compatible learning the Lowell Outdoor Lab allows are listed below:

- the bodily-kinesthetic to learn while running and moving
- the music-rhythmic to experience the sounds of nature
- the intrapersonal to enjoy reflective quiet and journaling time
- the interpersonal to interact socially with others while learning

- the visual spatial to observe learning in living color
- the logical mathematical to analyze, calculate and dissect
- the verbal-linguistic to communicate in all different ways

**"As teachers, we must be committed to continuously seeking, as well as imparting, new knowledge."**

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Teaching is both an art and a science. Education is a science based on a substantial body of research regarding both the processes of learning and best instructional practices. Educators are the problem solvers employing the research results in identifying what students need to learn and determining how best to assist each child in the learning process. Education is an art because each educator must creatively present the information to be learned - at times even entertaining students to hold their attention. We must balance the art and science of teaching as we tailor instruction to individual student needs.

As teachers, we must be committed to continuously seeking, as well as imparting, new knowledge. By keeping an open mind and a critical eye, we can capitalize on many opportunities for learning. Students, parents and colleagues present sources of learning daily. An abundance of information may be found in professional journals based on practice, theory and research. Many of us are fortunate to have staff development opportunities funded by our own school corporations. Regardless of our information sources, it remains imperative that we seek current information soundly founded and supported by research.

Teachers are facilitators of learning. In addition to providing the sources for learning, we must create an atmosphere within our classrooms conducive to learning. It must be educationally stimulating and emotionally comfortable in order to meet the needs of each individual student. Our classrooms are not separate entities but one segment of the community. For optimum success, the classroom atmosphere must be inviting to our students and to all who support their education-whether they are parents, school personnel, or community members.

Teaching is an enormous task with countless intangible rewards. Nothing compares to seeing the smile of a student who discovers he is reading for the first time, watching a child who came to school with minimal knowledge absorb knowledge and progress at an amazingly rapid pace, or employing a new teaching strategy and observing immediate student success. There are those moments that grab at your heart strings like reassuring a student on the playground and having him not only say "thanks" but also giving an unexpected hug. The rewards of loving the "problem kiddos" continue to come long after they have departed from your classroom with a smile of recognition, a "mouthed"

greeting in the halls, or coming back for a visit years after they have left our school.

Teaching, like life, is a mixture of challenges and opportunities. We must accept the challenges and seek the opportunities to reach out of our own comfort levels, capitalize on the positive aspects of each situation, realize the talents and limitations of ourselves and others, and use our own resources to fulfill our obligations, and “enjoy the ride!”

**Bob Urbani**  
**Peru Community Schools**  
**Peru Junior High School**  
**Band, Chior, and General Music, Grades 7 and 8**

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"I want to give my students all that I have to offer,  
and let them use me as a resource and role model."

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My philosophy centers on a very personalized approach to the learning experience. I've changed it this past year after listening to President Bush's speech that no child be left behind. I focus on the individual, their strengths, weaknesses and limitations and what I can do to stretch those limitations to their maximum maintaining an atmosphere of participation and fun. I reinforce with positive comments encouraging them to try to improve themselves. Morals and ethics play a large role as does the subject matter. I find them to be that which last longest in a students mind and the most applicable and important in the world both outside and inside the classroom.

I think that organization and setting obtainable goals is the key to my success as a teacher. I set daily, weekly and semester goals for each separate class. As an example for my Rap Lesson plan on the internet Criteria 1 (high) to 3 (low)  
**Effort:** 1. Excellent effort in class and group work. 2. Moderate effort in own work. 3. Little effort demonstrated.  
**Team Work:** 1. Works very well with others, listening to and supporting group suggestions and contributing own ideas. 2. Works moderately well with others, sometimes putting own ideas forward for discussion. 3. Has difficulty working with

others. Does not engage in group discussions, preferring to work alone.

**Rhythmic Understanding:** 1. Has an excellent grasp of the meter, uses syncopation, 4-bar phrases or shows proficiency using complex rhythmic patterns. 2. Is aware of the meter, and is generally successful in creating word patterns that fit with the best beat. 3. Shows little awareness of the meter, word patterns are disjointed, or do not fit the beat. **Performance:** 1. Shows confidence performing own composition with few mistakes. Demonstrates an awareness of the audience and genre. 2. Able to perform own composition with some fluency. Shows an awareness of own role in group. 3. Little confidence in performing own composition. Makes frequent mistakes or gives an incomplete performance.

I want to give my students all that I have to offer, and let them use me as a resource and role model. I want them to have a sense of history so they must make connections between today and the past in order to correctly interpret the latest trends of music.

My goals are to continue to have empathy for my students and the difficulties many of them encounter with their home life,

background or physical disability. Music has always been a, creative outlet for me and I've always had fun learning music. I want my students to share the enjoyment and love that I have for music so they can appreciate the aesthetics of making or listening to music and use this as their creative outlet or as their escape from their daily routines, troubles and conflicts.

**"The learning environment needs to provide active learning,  
life experiences, and a positive atmosphere."**

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As a teacher, my task is to present the mandated curriculum in a variety of ways. I teach the core subjects with an influence on humanities and fine arts. Therefore, I advocate aspects of both the Perennialist and Essentialist theories. I incorporate hands-on activities in order to offer a variety of learning methods for my students. As a result, I implement Progressive methods. Strict, yet fair, rules and procedures are established to promote structure in the classroom. Rewarding good behavior and discouraging poor choices indicate my Behaviorist motives. I apply life skills to the core subjects by drawing connections to life experiences, exemplifying Progressive and Existentialist approaches. Thus I draw from several philosophies to develop my own.

My role as a teacher involves being a good decision maker, team player, mediator, communicator, and disciplinarian. As a decision maker, I devise lesson plans and set rules and boundaries for an effective and efficient classroom. I want to cooperate with the special education teacher in order to successfully include all students. As a mediator, I use ethical standards to solve conflicts between students. Also, I seek to employ a variety of instructional methods that appeal to different learning styles and intelligences.

I accept the Erikson model of psychological development. Each stage depicts psychological crises that each child may experience through development. Often, children find it difficult to express their thoughts and emotions, especially toward adults. Therefore, I read research on child development in order to recognize and provide the essential needs for my students.

The learning environment needs to provide active learning, life experiences, and a positive atmosphere. Hands-on learning requires the use of several senses, while life experiences recognize cultural differences and encourage students to apply their learning to real-life. It is my goal to establish a positive classroom environment that encourages experimentation and develops self-assurance. I encourage my students to uplift fellow students in order for each child knows that he is loved and appreciated. I expect students to respect my authority as their teacher because I display respect for them as individuals. As a teacher, I am a decision maker who acts in the best interest of my students. I try to create interesting lesson plans that develop the content areas. Classroom environment is well structured and positive.



Community and parental involvement are encouraged. Mentoring programs, community action projects, and a personal example of servanthood are ways I endeavor to impact the life of students outside the school setting. By organizing workshops and preparing strategy folders for parents, I hope to equip them with skills for helping children and homework.

Most importantly, my goal is to make each child aware of his or her uniqueness and to help mold a child's potential into reality.

**Melissa Kay Walker**  
**Vigo County School Corporation**  
**West Vigo Middle School**  
**Mathematics, Grades 7 and 8**

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**"I truly believe that teaching is a noble profession ..."**

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I truly believe that teaching is a noble profession for without teachers there would be no doctors, lawyers, engineers, scientists, or any other profession. I know that I am a role model for my students, I hope and pray daily that I am a good one. I have had many jobs in my life on my road to becoming a teacher. I know from personal experience that there is no job any more difficult than being a quality educator in today's society. I also know that there is no job any more rewarding than teaching. What makes me an outstanding teacher is my willingness to learn, listen and share.

I learn from my peers at school and at local school meetings. I also am constantly looking for workshops to attend. The first of these workshops occurred with my association with the Indiana Math Initiative. It was here that I was first introduced to cooperative learning and partner pairing. The IMI gave me the courage and the tools to change the way I teach students. I now look for quality opportunities to learn even more.

My willingness to listen to my students is another important part of my success in the classroom. The tone in my room is such that students are able to share their

concerns about their homework or even problems at school. Students know that they are welcome to come to my room before school, at lunch, or after school if they are having difficulty with an assignment. I will never forget the night that one of my students stopped in for help. As we talked I realized that something else was troubling her so I asked if I could help. She proceeded to share with me that she was having difficulty at home and was thinking about committing suicide. Thank goodness the school counselor was also staying late that evening because we got her some help immediately. She is now married with two children.

The last thing that makes me a quality educator is my role as a facilitator at afterschool workshops. These are held once a month with my district colleagues. I also work with pre-service teachers at Indiana State University on incorporating technology into the elementary classroom. There is rarely a time that I go to a workshop and don't come back excited about some different way of approaching some difficult math topic. I love sharing these ideas with my peers. I have also found that by sharing this knowledge with others that my own knowledge has increased and these ideas have become even better activities.



**"If I create an environment which students will identify with and feel comfortable in, their learning abilities and achievement levels will improve."**

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"There is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses."

Aristotle, philosopher

I fully believe that all students should have exciting, fascinating, and interesting educational experiences. It is important that all students are actively involved in learning practical applications of any discipline that they are enrolled in.

Keeping this in mind, and realizing that students are responsible to learn local, state, and national standards and that I must incorporate those requirements, I try to create that atmosphere of excitement, adventure, and thought. In my case, science, using openended situations, scientific methods, various laboratory situations both inside and outside, and by building on any previous knowledge and history, the most difficult of problems or material can be analyzed.

I try to demonstrate personal commitment to my students and to my field not only in the classroom, but in additional supporting activities as well, whether it is research, after school activities, caring for the out of doors, or on a field trip. As a "science teacher", I must always remember that I teach students science and not necessarily science to students. Instead of just learning about a process,

we will perform it. Students should be "doing" science, not just reading about it. This, I feel can be translated into any other field. There is no reason why students should not be more actively involved in what they are learning. All it takes is guidance from a caring, energetic, knowledgeable, and interested teacher.

In a recent school newspaper, a student journalist wrote that I teach Science in a "gross, fun, and creative way." The student also commented in a rather humorous way about my classroom environment and practice: "I have never seen so much stuff, and what is sickening to really think about, we use it all and know what it is for!" As teachers, we have such incredible opportunities to empower our students to make them aware of their surroundings, locally and globally, in turn making them successful. That is exactly what I try to accomplish. I certainly feel that the students are not just our future, they are their own future.

My physical classroom setting changes regularly, just about as often as our topics, but my practice remains the same. Even though I rent four storage lockers and have filled cabinets, counters, cases and mini-barns, I still have the students try to use it all. If I create an environment

which students will identify with and feel comfortable in, their learning abilities and achievement levels will improve. Even though students may not realize it, they are learning every moment they walk in (or out) of my classroom. I try to incorporate something into the curriculum and the classroom that will “catch everybody’s fancy” and that they will enjoy and learn from or from me.

There are many rewards in teaching. These range from hearing former students tell of their adventures, successes and accomplishments to parents and community members coming in to the classroom to visit, observe, and even participate. When I am away from the classroom at a public venue, students always seem to come up to talk rather than them running away and hiding. Students in class share their own adventures and bring things in that relate to whatever might be on the “agenda” for the day. I am rewarded when the students say they had “fun” today and “cannot wait for tomorrow!” Little do they realize that the “fun” they had was a “wolf in sheep’s clothing”, as they actually learned something that day!

**Linda Weddell**  
**Brownsburg Community School Corporation**  
**Cardinal Elementary School**  
**Speech and Hearing Therapy, Grades K-12**

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**"My feeling is that when students get along and  
feel good about themselves, more learning takes place."**

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My philosophy of teaching is very simple. All children can learn, and, if given the proper environment in which to learn, they will learn. It is our challenge as educators to create and provide that environment. We have to make learning fun. We have to make learning challenging, and we have to make learning practical. If students are given these opportunities, they will succeed.

Since I only see children for approximately forty-five minutes per week, I know I have an extra challenge. Not only do I have responsibility for the children on my speech caseload, I also believe I hold responsibility for the communication skills of all the children in my building. While not all children qualify for speech and language services, all children do communicate, and many have deficits in this area. Therefore, I have created several classroom programs that I teach to many students to increase communication abilities and productivity in our ever changing society.

One program that I have created is called PALS (Polite, Accepting, Likeable, Students). This program is taught to several classrooms per year. It teaches social language skills through role-playing and instruction. The course of study includes such issues as responding

to teasing, saying you're sorry, when you need to cool off, when you're afraid, and many more. The program is ended each year with a unit on compliments. The focus of the entire PALS program is to not only learn appropriate social skills, but to build self-esteem. My feeling is that when students get along and feel good about themselves, more learning takes place.

Another program that I have been a part of creating is called SPOT (Speech and Occupational Therapy). This program is taught by the occupational therapist and me.

We focus on fine motor skills with a bombardment of language and vocabulary. We always do activities that the students can take into their everyday lives while reinforcing total independence. We have invited both parents and teachers to observe this class in order that they, too, can see how students with both speech and fine motor deficits can perform and learn activities that might be difficult for them.

While I work with many students who have language and vocabulary difficulties, I knew I needed to create a program that would make language and vocabulary meaningful to them in their everyday lives. To do this, I created a

community-based vocabulary program. I use pictures that I have taken in town of different fast food restaurants, grocery stores, churches, businesses, etc., and teach vocabulary by relating it to things with which they are familiar. For example, words such as booth, menu, and beverage, take on new meaning when the students can relate them to their next trip to McDonald's. Likewise, children with language problems struggle so much with idioms. Because idioms are used so much in our everyday language, I knew I needed to do something to help students understand them and not take them literally. For my speech students, I have created a real interest in idioms by having an "Idiom of the Week!" This has sparked a real interest for my students in this area. I feel my role is to not only teach and educate students but to teach and educate parents and teachers. By this two-fold approach, the students get reinforcement in all environments, and it makes them eager to learn new speech and language skills. A good speech and language program is a cooperative effort among student, parent, and all the school staff. When this happens, everyone achieves more!

**Jennifer Renee Wells**  
**Hamilton Community School District**  
**Hamilton Junior-Senior High School**  
**French, Junior High and High School — Journalism, Grades 9-12**

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**"Listen to the students, keep an open mind,  
and have high expectations."**

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When asked to discuss my philosophy of teaching, I am told to describe my personal feelings and beliefs. I have many feelings and beliefs as a teacher.

I believe that the students in our society need more focus on school and responsibility of their actions. I believe kids need more control of their learning. They need to have a say in some of the things they do. On a daily basis, kids come into my class with so many things on their minds. Often, teachers are the people who care more about them than parents. It saddens me to see this.

Students need to have someone listen to them, someone who expects them to do their best and put forth their best effort. I am a person who does this. I expect a lot of my students. I always keep an open mind and remember the things they have to deal with at home. I am tolerant and I understand what it is like to be a kid. I am a youthful person who does what it takes to get kids motivated and eager to learn.

I think my teaching style reflects a lot of my skills as a listener and as a planner. I do not hesitate to change my lessons at the last minute because someone wants to have a discussion about a specific topic,

or because the kids had a situation arise that affected many. My kids learn from me, and I think the reason is because of the open-mind I have about their education.

I know what I am expected, by the state, to teach. I always meet my standards, but I let my students have a lot of input in what we do. The kids have say in the topics we cover, the means we learn and the amount of time we spend.

I think my listening to them makes what I do work. We play games, have review activities, speak, talk, listen—whatever we need to do to cover the material. I do evaluations of my class and of me from time to time, so the kids can tell me what we need to work on. This helps make class work.

I do not spoon feed the activities to my students. I expect them to do their work and do it by themselves. They know when they come into my class that their homework has to be done on time and I will not tolerate lateness. I am not late, and I expect that they are not late. Kids don't have enough responsibility at home. Many don't have someone who has high expectations of them, so it is my responsibility to be that person.



My philosophy of education is this: Listen to the students, keep an open mind, and have high expectations. If a teacher does this, their classroom will be a success and the outcome will be phenomenal.

**Gail Waluk Woolever**  
**Kankakee Valley School Corporation**  
**Wheatfield Elementary School**  
**Visual Arts, Grades K-3 and 9-12**

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**"It is important that the students feel confident to experiment  
and try new ways of thinking in the art room."**

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I believe teaching to be the most important profession that anyone can pursue in life. Teachers help develop the thinking processes of our future citizens, providing our children with the knowledge, skills, integrity and character needed to be good citizens and leaders. This is a most demanding task.

Helping each child discover his/her unique gifts, talents and strengths to build a fulfilling life is my goal as a teacher. I want to develop in my students a love for learning and a confidence to try new things. Instilling in my students the appreciation that learning is a life-long activity—one filled with fun and adventure is what I strive for in working in education.

In following with the old saying, “there are many ways to skin a cat”, I want the students I come in contact with to know that there are many ways to solve problems. Just because no one has ever done something before in a certain way is not an acceptable answer to a problem in my life. In teaching art, I stress the need to be different. There are as many different answers for a project as there are children in a classroom. It is important that the students feel confident to experiment and try new ways of thinking in the art room.

I endeavor to stress to all of my students that there is a certain valuable uniqueness in each and every one of them. Their job as the student is to discover that uniqueness and my job as the teacher is to nurture and channel it into productivity. We must all be active participants in the educational process.

Following the state guidelines for the art curriculum, I approach the teaching of art as part history, part cultural awareness, part aesthetic appreciation and a lot of problem solving. I draw on many resources to pique the interest of the students. We frequently will eat our still-life projects or devour fruits that demonstrate radial balance before learning how to draw it in first grade. Fifth graders ate seven different Egyptian foods and structured the class as if we were an Egyptian society with pharaoh and the court to gain a better understanding of the society to understand how the art was an integral part of the class structure and religion.

I feel that I am an outstanding teacher because I teach about life, not just art. Pulling from many resources allows the children to see the interconnectedness of subjects in education. As an avid traveler, collector and learner, I have many resource boxes in the art room for students

and staff to use. We begin using these books and curios as early as kindergarten to begin learning how to do research and apply knowledge to different areas.

In order for each child to feel confident about his work, it is important to give that child honest attention and direction. What might look like a mistake can actually be a challenging detour into a new direction for the art work. This means little sitting at the desk. There is a lot of talking and movement in my classes and what might look like chaos from the outside, but there is a lot of learning taking place also.

I love teaching. There have been periods in my career of utter frustration with the profession but those periods have been few and far between. Through the creation of art, I have the opportunity to witness the thought processes involved in all aspects of problem solving. When a child realizes that he needs math skills to fit something together, or that there is a subtle meaning to a painting, or that there is art around us, I am rewarded. For me, when a child gets excited about a project and is able to channel that excitement through work, it is a thrill that cannot be surpassed. I am proud to be a teacher.

# Indiana Teachers of the Year

Below is the roll of Indiana Teachers of the Year (national finalists marked with asterisks 1978, 1994, and 1996):

- 1957 Myrtle Burns (Thomas Jefferson Elementary School, South Bend, and Lincoln Elementary School, LaPorte)
- 1968 Robert Wray (South Side High School, Fort Wayne)
- 1969 Carl Ebel (South Ripley High School, Versailles)
  
- 1970 Kay Mendenhall (Oliver Morton Elementary School, Winchester)
- 1971 Rudolph Holycross (Columbia City High School)
- 1972 Ruth Swank (Riverside Elementary School, Fort Wayne)
- 1973 Emaline Kleinknecht (Tekopel Elementary School, Evansville)
- 1974 Charles Stephens (Joy Elementary School, Michigan City)
- 1975 Barbara D. Moore (Western Elementary School, Russiaville)
- 1976 Joyce McFadden (Dwight Eisenhower Elementary School, Crown Point)
- 1977 Oscar Underwood (Southwick Elementary School, Fort Wayne)
- 1978 \* Sue Talbot (University Elementary School, Bloomington)
- 1979 Robert Ciscell (South Decatur Junior-Senior High School, Greensburg)
  
- 1980 Daniel Rayschich (John Hinds Area Vocational School, Elwood)
- 1981 Calvin Lee (Hoagland Elementary School)
- 1982 Sofia Rodriguez (Snider High School, Fort Wayne)
- 1983 Victor Bardonner (Lawrence Central High School, Indianapolis)
- 1984 Glen Dillman (Carroll Junior High School, Flora)
- 1985 Paulette Cwidak (John Adams High School, South Bend)
- 1986 Bernard Barcio (Carmel High School)
- 1987 Bob Mulligan (John Glenn High School, Walkerton)
- 1988 Tony Willis (Jeffersonville High School)
- 1989 Karen McKibbon (LaSalle High School, South Bend)
  
- 1990 Mary Kay Baker (Rise Learning Center, Indianapolis)
- 1991 Darcia King-O'Brien (Navarre Middle School, South Bend)
- 1992 Michael Kaiser (Pine View Elementary School, New Albany)
- 1993 Diane Cutshall Hayes (Indian Meadows Elementary School, Fort Wayne)
- 1994 \* Francis Mustapha (South Side High School, Fort Wayne)
- 1995 Katherine Stahl (Maywood Elementary School, Hammond)

1996 \* Dan Durbin (Francis Joseph Reitz High School, Evansville)  
1997 Judy Fraps (Greenbriar Elementary School, Indianapolis)  
1998 Kim Giesting (Connersville Senior High School)  
1999 Larry Hurt (Ben Davis High School, Indianapolis)

2000 Kathy Politz (West Vigo Elementary School, Terre Haute)  
2001 Kurran Strunk (Muessel Elementary School, South Bend)  
2002 Terri L. Boutin (S. Ellen Jones Elementary School, New Albany)  
2003 Robert Pickett (Marion Elementary School, Sheridan)  
2004 Mark Weaver (Clay Junior High School, Carmel)